

MARCH/APRIL 2006

CONSERVATIONIST

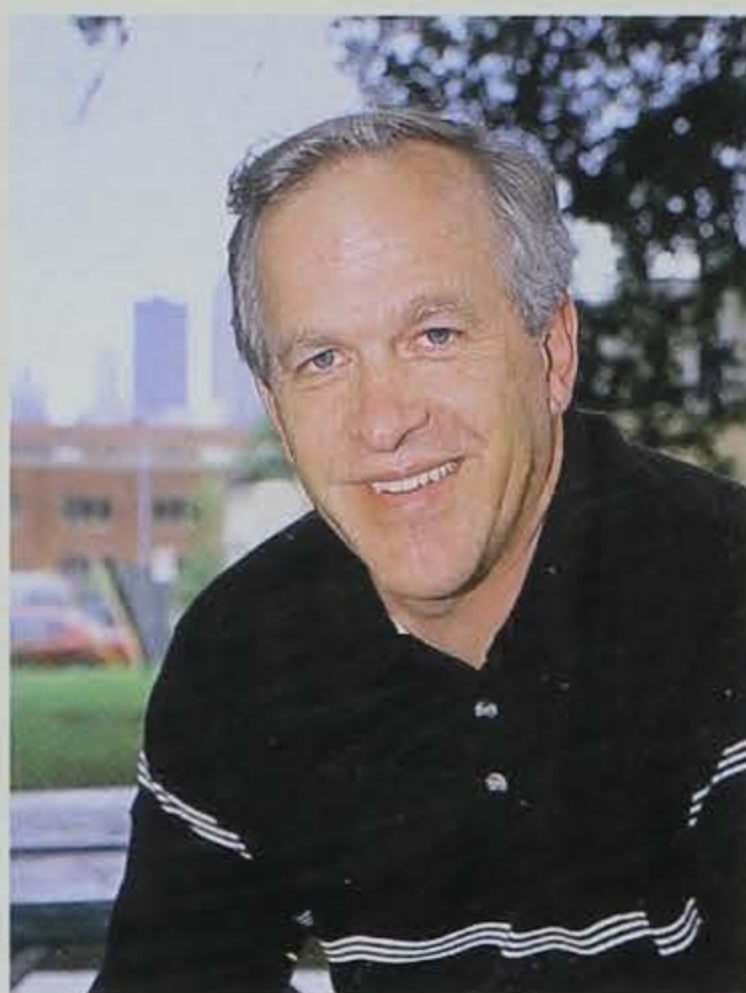
IOWA

DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

2006
FISHING
FORECAST

WHERE TO FIND ALL THE
HOT SPOTS IN IOWA

FROM THE DIRECTOR



Bob Castelline

Building a Better Place to Live

In the last issue of the *Iowa Conservationist*, I shared with you a letter prepared for the Iowa Legislature regarding water quality standards. In this issue, we share highlights of the recently completed *Iowa Wildlife Action Plan*.

The wildlife plan, as you will read later in this issue, is about habitat. It's about how we treat our natural resources in Iowa. It's about the value we place on the natural treasures here. It's about what we envision for the future of our state.

The *Iowa Wildlife Action Plan* is a coordinated effort lead by the Conservation and Recreation Division of the DNR, with input from a vast array of citizens and conservation organizations. Water quality standards have been primarily driven by the Environmental Services Division of the DNR, with input from environmental and stakeholder groups.

The habitat improvements called for in the wildlife plan, both on the land and in the water, are part and parcel to the efforts needed to improve water quality. The water quality standards are the cornerstone of determining what kind of work needs to be done and measuring success after it occurs. Like the DNR itself, these seemingly separate functions are actually

one-in-the-same when it comes to the ultimate goal of achieving an Iowa that values and protects its natural resources.

This year marks the 20th anniversary of the formation of the Department of Natural Resources and to many citizens, we are still viewed as two separate agencies — a recreational side and an environmental protection side.

But the two efforts above exemplify how this department, although probably the most broad-based agency in state government, comes together for a common mission summarized perfectly in our mission statement: **To conserve and enhance our natural resources in cooperation with individuals and organizations to improve the quality of life for Iowans and ensure a legacy for future generations.**

The essence of both the wildlife plan and the water quality standards is not to define what we are, but what we should aspire to be. It's about leaving a legacy to future generations affirming that we can leave our natural resources better than we found them. It's about making Iowa a better state — a better, more desirable place to live.

Director's Message

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FRONT COVER: BY LOWELL WASHBURN

Renee Ollenburg, of Lake Mills, bagged her first gobbler during the 2005 spring season. She shot the 3-year-old, 24-pound bird in northeast Iowa at a range of 25 yards.

"I was really shaking, having trouble breathing and all that good stuff," laughed Ollenburg. "That hunt was definitely one of the most exciting things I've done in a long time, and it all happened in such a beautiful part of the state."

Read more about springtime in northeast Iowa in *Iowa Grand Slam* on page 30.

BACK COVER: PASS ON A TRADITION BY CLAY SMITH



Lowell Washburn

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Director's Message

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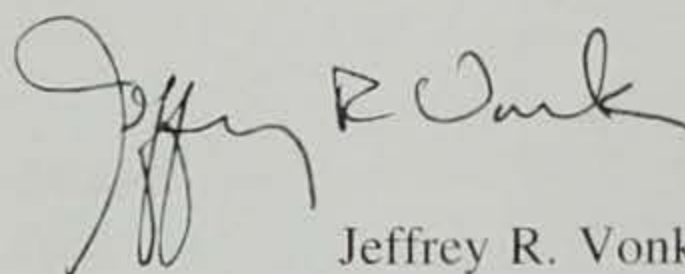
And as director of the DNR, I can say that protecting and improving the natural resources is central to the mission of every employee here — regardless of what division they work for.

I have the joy — and admittedly, some of the headaches — of directing a department with what, on the surface, often appears to be two very different functions consisting of conservation/recreation and environmental protection. To this day, I still hear the occasional references to the “black hat side of the department

and white hat side of the department.”

As to who wears what color hat in this department, I have to honestly plead innocence. From the sum of my experience and beliefs, I can tell you that regarding those who abuse our natural resources, we **all** wear black hats here and to those who value, conserve and use our natural resources sustainably, we wear white.

And that is the way it **should** be!



Jeffrey R. Vonk



Editor's Note: In the Jan/Feb 2006 issue, we inadvertently left out contact information for our article *Iowa Native Launches Environmental Fund-Raiser*. To learn more about the San Rafael Preserve, follow the ride's progress through a trek diary or to contribute to the ride, visit the official website at www.pla.net.py/sanrafael

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To provide educational pathways to enable Iowans to make responsible environmental decisions.

Our Vision:

ICEC strives to ensure a healthy environment in Iowa by improving environmental literacy. ICEC promotes innovative educational methods and strategies; develops diverse partnerships; facilitates networking; provides access to information, research and trends; and embraces a balanced perspective on environmental issues.

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2006 fishingforecast

new and improved:
iowa lake, stream and facility improvements

Lake Projects Paying Dividends To Iowa Anglers

Story by Mick Klemesrud Photos by Clay Smith

It's spring and the novelty of attending the various sport and vacation shows has worn off. Baseball is down to making its final roster cuts and spring football is getting underway. The days are getting longer, and the sun is getting warmer. Oil the reels folks because it's time. The 2006 open water fishing season is finally here.

The Iowa Department of Natural Resources fisheries experts from around the state expect fishing to be good again this year in part because past water quality improvement projects have led to better water quality in lakes and streams. There have been a number of new physical improvements at several lakes in recent years that are now paying dividends. Better yet, it was another year of impressive fish growth.

Nowhere has the fish growth been more welcome than at Spirit Lake, where the 13-inch-plus walleyes from the 2001 class have finally moved past 14 inches and "a load is ready in the spring," said Tom Gengerke, fisheries supervisor for northwest Iowa.

Taking a quick look around

the state, and there is probably no other region as poised for success as southwest Iowa, where numerous projects and lake renovations are beginning to show results. The DNR added spawning beds, in-lake habitat, improved lake watersheds and renovated fish populations aggressively during the last few years. At Icaria, Anita and Fogle lakes, anglers should have excellent fishing. This is year three for the fish renovations at Icaria and Anita. Both lakes should have excellent fishing, especially Anita, if it refills. Anita is still about 5 feet low.

"If Anita fills, fishing will be gangbusters. If it doesn't fill, fishing will still be good, and we will try to provide access to put a boat on the lake," said Andy Moore, fisheries supervisor for southwest Iowa. "Icaria has 13- to 15-inch walleyes already and bluegills in the 7-1/2-inch neighborhood."

Improvements to Fogle Lake included lowering the lake level to combat an over-abundance of small fish, and installing spawning beds to bring fish near shore and available to land-bound anglers.

Spawning beds were placed in a number of other lakes in southwest Iowa in 2005 and more will be added in 2006. But anglers will have to do some exploring. Moore said he doesn't plan to reveal the locations.

While seeing those lakes rebound is good news, there is an old standby not too far away poised for another banner year.

"We had great crappie fishing last year at Lake Rathbun and we will again this year," said Steve Waters, fisheries supervisor for southeast Iowa. "This lake is a destination for crappie and walleye anglers. Last year the walleyes went wild with possibly the best fishing ever in 2005."

Walleye fishing at Rathbun is a little different than other traditional walleye lakes: it is a summer fishery. As the heat of the summer approaches and walleye fishing is generally slowing, Rathbun is just beginning. There is also an excellent number of channel catfish and a booming population of white bass that has gone somewhat ignored.

As for the traditional walleye lakes – Clear, Spirit, Storm, Black

Hawk and West Okoboji – how will fishing be in 2006? Just fine.

At Clear Lake, the tremendous start in 2005 was slowed when the yellow bass spawn hatched, offering a huge feast and making old marble eyes more finicky. “The fish are averaging 16 to 19 inches, and should provide good action this year,” Gengerke said. Yellow bass should average 10 inches, but will be fewer in number from past years. There is also a substantial increase in the muskie population, with an estimated 25 percent of the fish surveyed in the spring of 2005 exceeding 40 inches.

Storm and Black Hawk lakes each have improving walleye numbers and sizes but will probably offer better fishing for other species. Storm Lake should have excellent fishing for channel catfish, between 2 and 5 pounds, and white bass throughout the entire open water season. Black Hawk Lake will have tremendous fishing for 8- to 10-inch crappies and bullheads, and good early spring action for yellow bass.

West Okoboji Lake and its tremendous water quality and topography offers a diverse fishery, but the most consistent species in this lake is the bluegill. Of course smallmouth bass, muskie, northern pike, largemouth bass, walleye and yellow perch will be available in the 136-foot deep lake, and offer a different challenge. But the most consistent fish has been, and should be again, the scrappy bluegill.

“You really never know what you’re going to catch at West Okoboji, because this lake really

has it all,” Gengerke said. “It’s nice to come in with some big crappies, a walleye or two, some perch and a basket of bluegills. There is a lot of northern pike in the lake and smallmouth and largemouth bass.”

Bluegills will also be the premier species at Lake Sugema.

“If you’re a bluegill buster, put this one on your chart. The lake has good habitat and is just a tremendous bluegill lake,” Waters said. Other “circle on the map” bluegill lakes are Hawthorn, Belva Deer, Geode, Wapello, Big Creek, Fogle and the backwaters of the Mississippi River.

“Lake Geode is the Duke basketball of bluegills. It is consistently one of the top producers in the state over the years,” Waters said. “And Lake Wapello is one of my favorite escape lakes. The renovation work in the 1990s has brought good fishing and good water quality. It has become a consistently great fishery for bluegills — up to 10 inches.”

Quality bluegill fishing is also available at Lake Hawthorn, but it is just one of many attractions at this 172-acre lake in Mahaska County. The lake has incredible bass structure, and probably the best bass population, for all sizes up to 8 pounds, Waters said. Plus it has

A number of improvement projects in recent years is paying off for Iowa anglers. Water quality initiatives, infrastructure improvements and habitat development have all created additional and enhanced fishing conditions.



an excellent population of channel catfish up to 22 inches. "Right now, it is the place to go," Waters said. "Hawthorn is a complete lake, in the middle of nowhere."

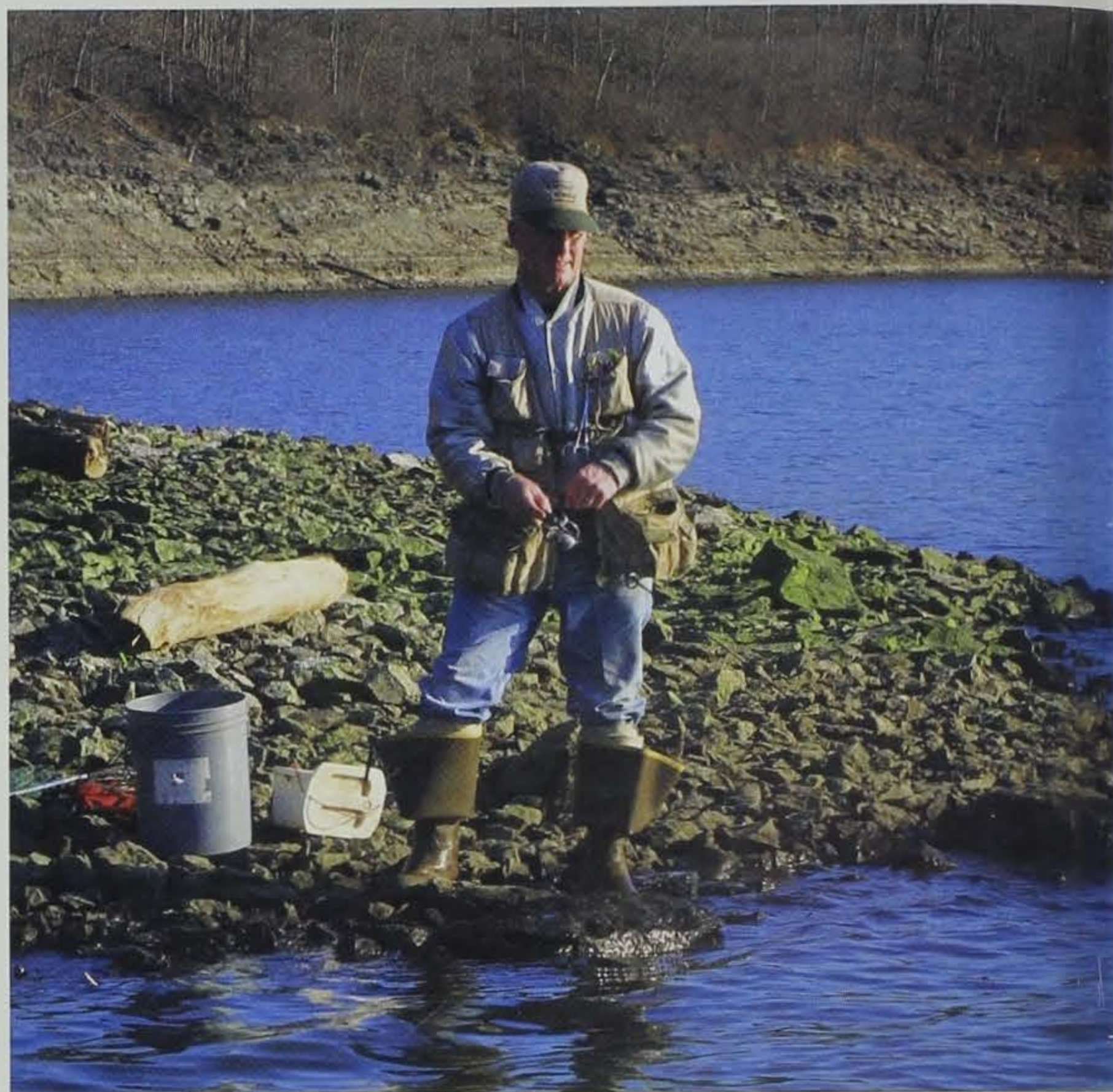
Big Creek is making a move to become a premier bluegill lake this year. "This is an excellent bluegill fishery and is something people should take advantage of, especially in early June," Moore said. "If you find the spawning beds, you can do okay."

Another standby, the mighty Mississippi, has the best fish diversity in the state. There is good bluegill fishing in the backwaters, and the river is a channel catfish factory and can offer many different fishing experiences.

"Largemouth bass, crappie, bluegill, walleye, sauger — the Mississippi River has it all," said Bryan Hayes, fisheries biologist at Manchester. The upper Mississippi River has a robust population of northern pike.

Walleye anglers in the Big River begin fishing the tailwaters in early spring, then move to the wing dams during the summer months. In Pools 9 through 15, there is a lot of young walleyes coming on and fishing will be improving. Extensive habitat work at Mud and Sunfish lakes at the lower end of Pool 11 near Dubuque, are providing important deep water and over winter habitat, and will offer excellent panfish and bass fishing.

The in-river habitat improvements at Mud and Sunfish lakes were not the only projects in northeast Iowa. Some important



cold water streams also saw extensive work.

Hayes said that work has contributed to a tremendous growth in the number of streams with self-sustaining, naturally reproducing trout populations. In 1990, there were six streams with self-sustaining populations of brown or brook trout. Today, there are 27. Watershed improvements, combined with a research project on the survival of fingerlings reared from wild trout, has made today the "good old days" when it comes to trout fishing.

In Allamakee County at Big Paint Creek, major habitat work during 2004 and 2005 has improved the stream dramatically, and more is planned for 2006. "In the past,

Big Paint Creek was considered a marginal stream, with trout stockings in the spring and fall, but not in the heat of the summer. Now we can stock it year round, on a weekly basis," Hayes said.

Big Paint winds through a mix of public and private land and into the Yellow River State Forest. Some of the private land is open to public fishing, but not all. Hayes said it is important to the future of fishing that anglers respect private property, take out everything they take in and treat the land with respect.

Another project that is showing major improvements is Lake Macbride.

"Macbride is one of the lakes I'm most excited about," Waters



A number of Iowa lakes will look a lot different to Iowa anglers in 2006. A number of lakes have undergone additions and improvements in recent years, including the addition of fishing piers, jetties and enhanced fish populations.

to 300 feet long. There are a lot of public accesses in that stretch and fishing has been good.

Rivers can be a bit tricky to fish, but have the potential to offer unbelievable action. In northeast Iowa, smallmouth bass should be king this year in the Maquoketa River, especially in the catch-and-release area from the Delhi Dam downstream, in the Upper Iowa, the Cedar from Janesville north and the Wapsipinicon from Central City through Independence. Other rivers with improving smallmouth numbers are the Volga, Turkey and Mississippi River Pool 9 through 13. Many of these same streams also have tremendous walleye fishing.

"From a smallmouth standpoint, I think things are looking better out there, and the walleye population has been improving ever since 2000," said Hayes.

Things are looking better nearly everywhere when it comes to fishing. There have been a number of projects to improve fishing across the state over the last year or two, including new fishing jetties, fish cleaning stations, boat ramps, stream accesses and more.

The northwest district alone accounted for two gravel boat ramps, three dredging projects, three universally accessible fishing piers, two in-lake habitat projects and four

accesses. Also added were four docks, three ramps, five fish cleaning stations, one pier, three jetties, one silt pond and one aeration system in the past four years.

There are a number of projects slated for 2006, including lake renovation projects at Viking, Cold Springs, Pierce Creek and Thayer.

Viking Lake will be lowered in the fall and killed out to eliminate a yellow bass population that has taken over the lake. It will be restocked in the fall with advanced-growth fingerlings, including 2- to 3-inch bluegills, 5-inch largemouth bass and 7-inch channel catfish. More than 20 silt basins will be installed in the watershed to keep nutrients and sediment out of Viking Lake.

"We won't do anything to the lake level until after Labor Day," Moore said.

The renovation plans at Cold Springs, Pierce Creek and Thayer Lake are to combat carp and grass carp that has impaired water quality.

So, with all the new features, watershed improvements, fish stocking and other work, what will make 2006 a good year of fishing?

"The combination of standby lakes and the lakes coming off renovation work, and watershed improvements will make it a good year. The improved water quality means better fish growth and better fishing," Moore said.

Waters had a different take.

"This will be a good year if people get off the couch, saddle up the vehicle and head out for fishing," Waters said. "The opportunities are everywhere, just make yourself a part of it."

said. Improvements to keep sediment out of the lake, protect the shoreline, and new in-lake fish attracting habitat have led to excellent water quality and clarity and to an improved fishery. Macbride has a lot of 8- to 10-inch crappies, and a great bass population, including the hard fighting Kentucky spotted bass. Waters said he is also starting to see catchable-size bluegills that had been absent in the past.

Also making a re-appearance is the smallmouth bass population in the catch-and-release-only area of the Middle Raccoon River, from the Lennon Mills Dam at Panora to the Redfield Dam. Moore said sections of the river were deepened to 10 to 12 feet, and some holes were dug up

northeast

iowa

By Bill Kalishek, Regional Fisheries Supervisor

smallmouth bass

Cedar River, **Bremer** – Decent numbers of smallmouth bass between Waverly and Janesville.

Cedar River
Floyd and Mitchell

– Good populations throughout both counties; catch-and-release from Halverson Park to the dam at Otranto.

Maquoketa River catch-and-release area, **Delaware** – Classic rock habitat in this stretch makes for excellent smallmouth bass fishing. Better than average reproduction during early 2000s has resulted in good numbers of fish exceeding 12 inches available.

Maquoketa River, **Jones** – Anglers fishing from Monticello dam downstream through Pictured Rocks area will find fair numbers of smallies.

Mississippi River, **Pools 9 through 13** – Better numbers of smallmouths can be found in Pools 9 and 10, but fish-

able populations are present downstream through Pool 13. Fish along shoreline rock protection, rocky day markers, and wingdams, especially during low water conditions. Good numbers of 10- to 13-inch fish but fish up to 4 pounds are routinely caught.



Turkey River,
Clayton, Fayette, Winneshiek, and

Howard) – You can find smallmouth

anywhere just about in this river. Try wading the portion in Howard County during the summer.

Upper Iowa River, **Allamakee, Winneshiek, and Howard** – Good smallmouth numbers throughout this river. Float the upstream areas in Howard County during higher flows in the spring.

Volga River, **Fayette** – Small stream that can be fished by floating or wading; public access at the Volga River Recreation Area and the town of Fayette.

Wapsipinicon River, **Buchanan** – A lot of fish in the 10- to 15-inch range. Fish rocky shorelines or fallen woody structure with both live baits or artificial lures. Recent fish surveys show improved numbers.

channel catfish

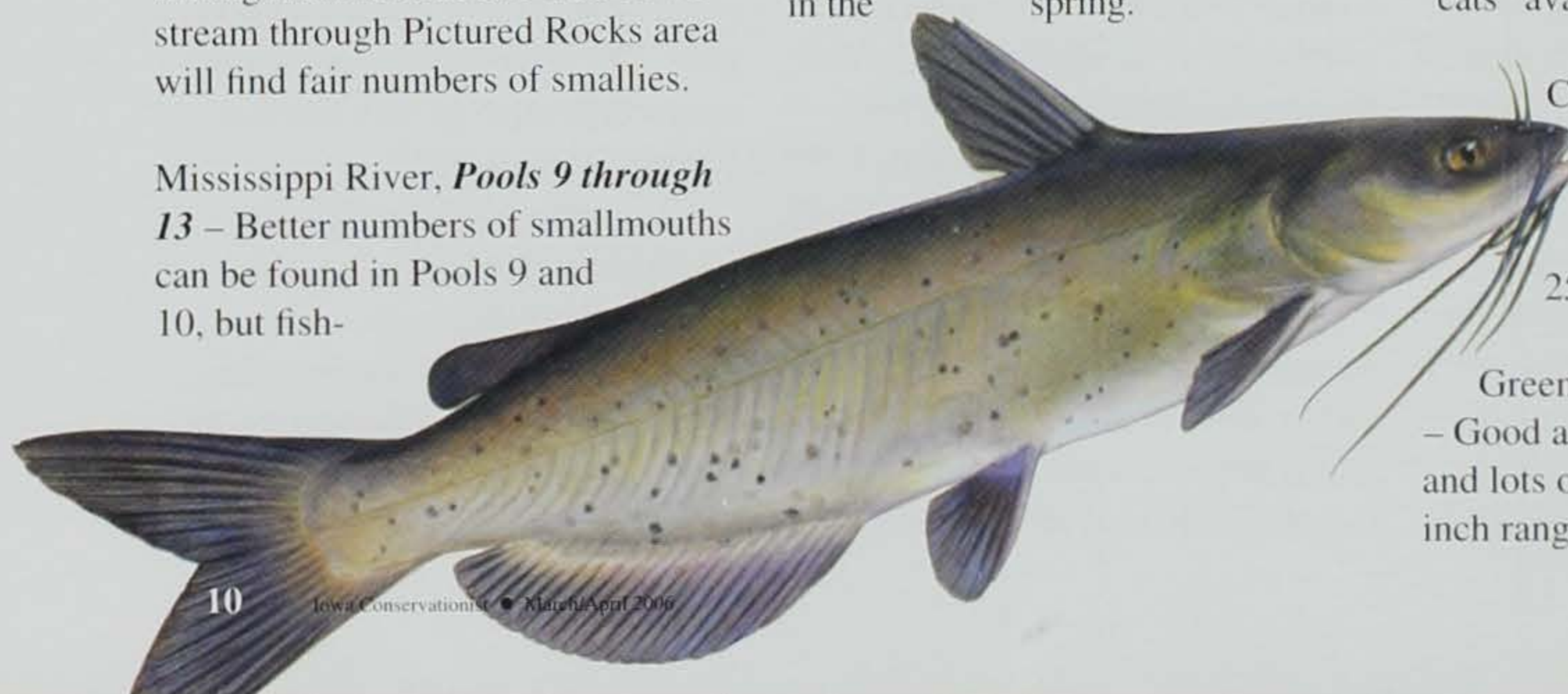
Big Woods Lake, **Black Hawk** – Big fish and lots of them. The connection with the Cedar River pumps catfish into this lake.

Casey Lake, **Tama** – Local favorite. Good shoreline access. Catfish of all sizes available.

Cedar River, **Bremer** – 2005 fish survey indicates excellent numbers of “cats” available.

Cedar, **Floyd and Mitchell** – Very good numbers from the Mitchell dam downstream with 20- to 25-inch fish present.

Greenbelt Lake, **Black Hawk** – Good access for family outings and lots of catfish in the 11- to 15-inch range.



Lake Hendricks, **Howard** – Good population of 15- to 20-inch catfish with some up to 25.

Maquoketa River, **Delaware** – Good numbers and size of catfish available. Early morning and late evening is best. Best fishing from Manchester to Lake Delhi dam.

Mississippi River, **Pools 9-15** – Excellent reproduction past few years has produced huge numbers of channel cats in the Mississippi. Try fishing flowing water along secondary channels near brush piles. Size of catfish varies from fiddlers to 4 pounds.

Volga Lake, **Fayette** – Excellent population of all sizes with very abundant 15- to 20-inchers; fish the rip-rap along the dam in mid-summer.

Wapsipinicon River, **Buchanan** – Good numbers of 3- to 5-pound catfish between Otterville and Littleton.

Ensign Hollow, **Clayton** – This catch-and-release-only stream

provides the opportunity to catch trophy-sized brown trout.

Grannis Creek, **Fayette** – Stocked with rainbow and brook trout weekly from April through October; greatly improved habitat and universal fishing access.

Paint Creek, **Allamakee** – Major habitat improvement

Richmond Springs, **Delaware** – Stocked with catchable-size rainbow trout both during the week and on Saturdays, this is a popular place for family fishing.

Sny Magill Creek, **Clayton** – Increased brown trout population due to fingerling stockings; stocked regularly with rainbows and brooks.

Spring Branch, **Delaware** – Strong population of brown trout 12 inches and greater. Three continuous miles of coldwater stream open to fishing. Good insect hatches on this stream.

Swiss Valley, **Dubuque** – Three consecutive years of fish habitat work helps support trout year round in this county park.

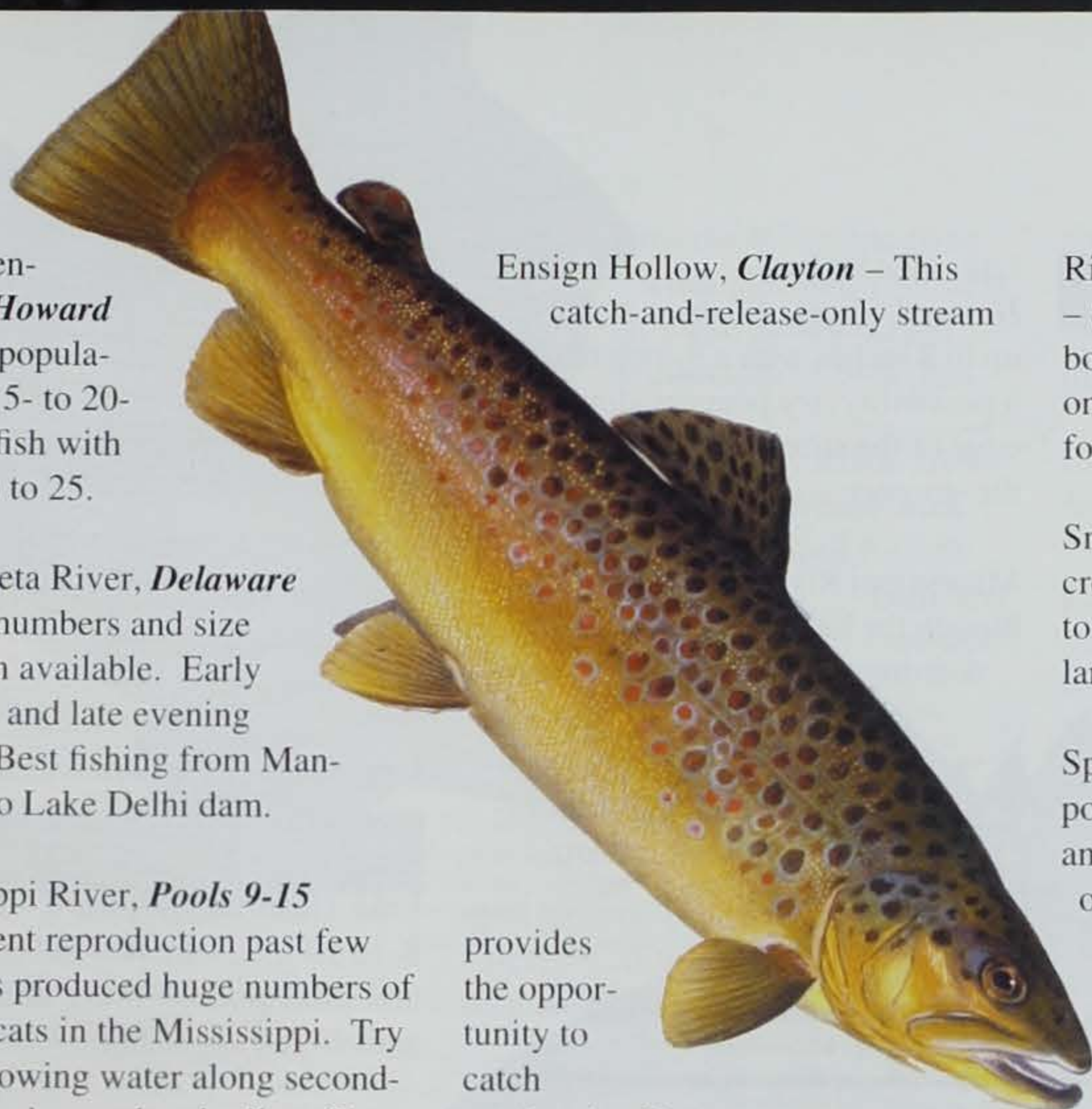
Trout Run, **Winneshiek** – Improvements in trout habitat has resulted in excellent survival of weekly stocked rainbows and brook trout; some wild

brown trout also inhabit this stream.

Waterloo Creek, **Allamakee** – Excellent population of wild brown trout in lower reaches; upper segments stocked with rainbow and brook trout weekly.

Dalton Pond, **Jackson** – Physical improvements to this small area create a park-like atmosphere. Easy, laid-back pond fishing with close access.

project completed in 2005; stocked with rainbows and brooks; wild brown trout also present.



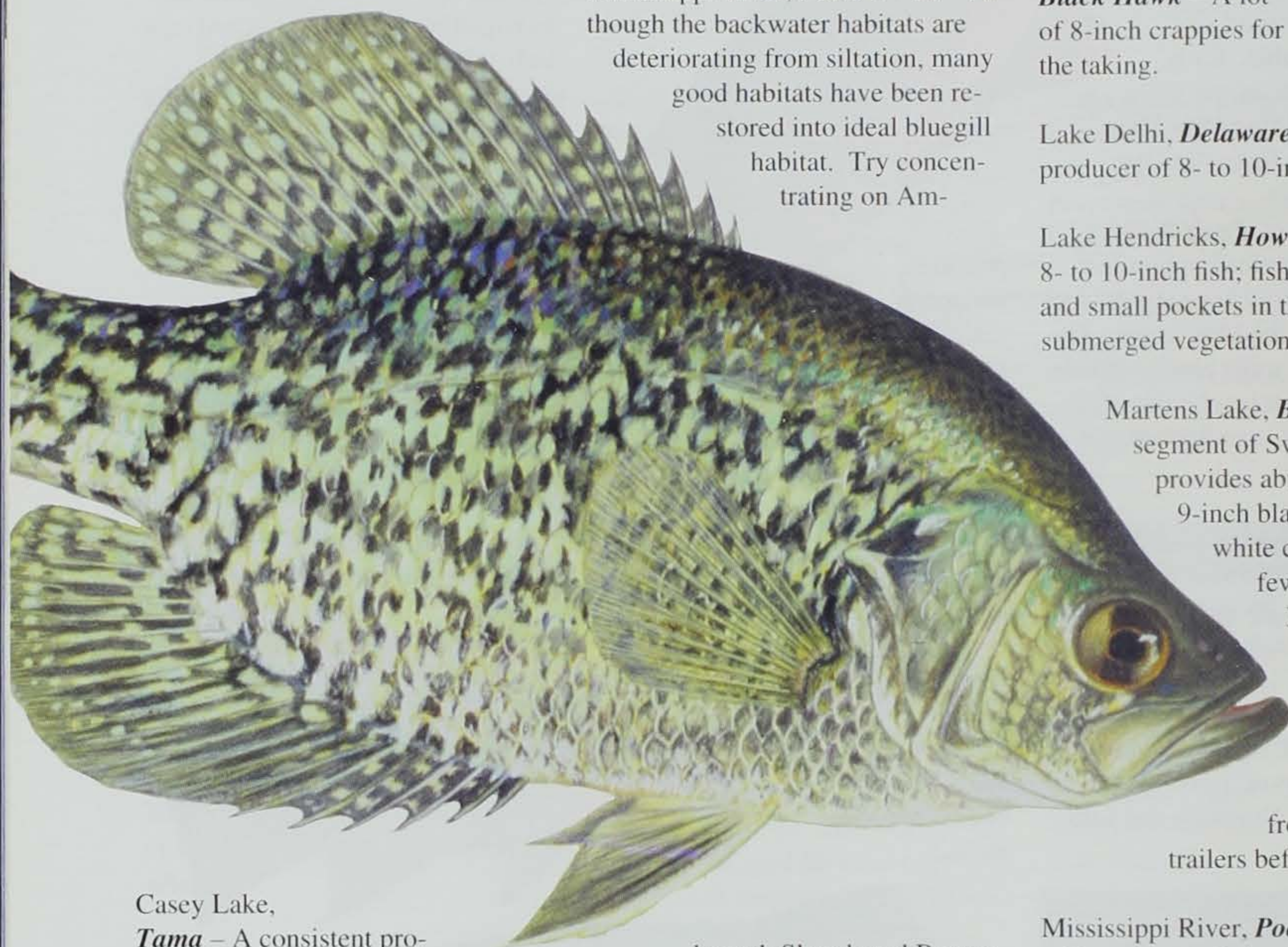
trout

bluegills

Bergfeld Pond, **Dubuque** – Located in Dubuque industrial park. This lake is easy for families to fish for abundant 6- to 7-inch bluegills.

Lake Hendricks, **Howard** – Lots of fish up to 8 inches with a 9-inch bluegill a possibility; try poppers along the edge of the submerged vegetation in the summer.

Mississippi River, **Pools 9 – 14** – Although the backwater habitats are deteriorating from siltation, many good habitats have been re-stored into ideal bluegill habitat. Try concentrating on Am-



Casey Lake, **Tama** – A consistent producer of 8-inch bluegills. Look for these “gills” on beds in May or drift the main lake during the summer months.

Lake Delhi, **Delaware** – Good numbers of bluegills in the 7- to 8-inch range. Fish the fallen woody structure along rocky shorelines. Fish early morning or late afternoon to avoid heavy boat traffic on this narrow Maquoketa River impoundment.

brough Slough and Bussey Lake in Pool 10, Sunfish Lake and Bertom Lake in Pool 11, Browns Lake and Pomme de Terre Lake in Pool 13.

Volga Lake, **Fayette** – Good numbers of 6-8 inch bluegills; the face of the dam (especially in early spring) and submerged brush piles on the south shore are good areas.

crappies

Big Woods Lake, **Black Hawk** – A lot of 8-inch crappies for the taking.

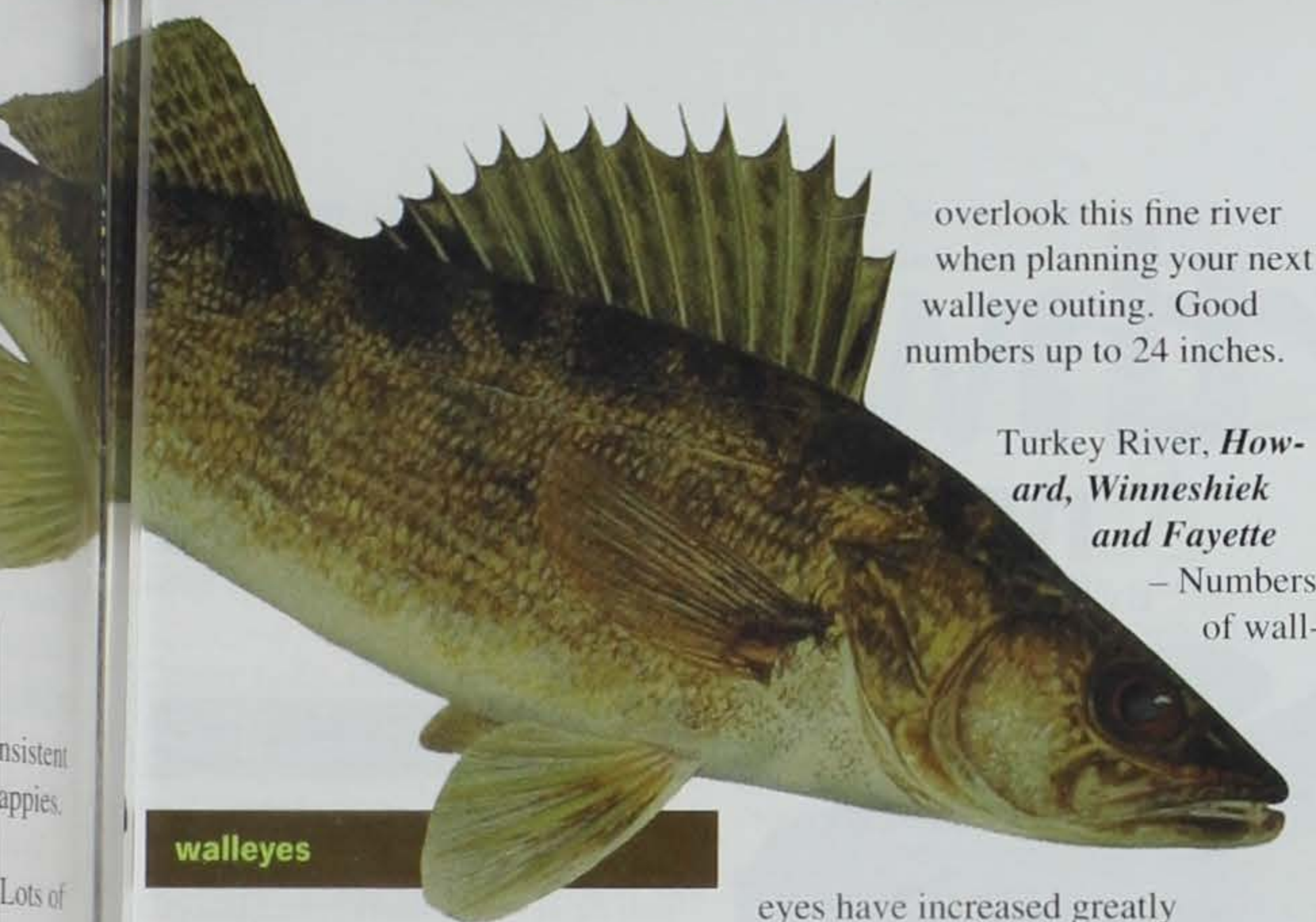
Lake Delhi, **Delaware** – Consistent producer of 8- to 10-inch crappies.

Lake Hendricks, **Howard** – Lots of 8- to 10-inch fish; fish the outer edge and small pockets in the abundant submerged vegetation.

Martens Lake, **Bremer** – This segment of Sweet Marsh provides abundant 8- to 9-inch black crappies; white crappies much fewer but larger. Eurasian water milfoil present so remove all aquatic vegetation from boats and trailers before leaving.

Mississippi River, **Pools 9-14** – Crappie populations remain strong in the Mississippi. Best times are early morning and late afternoon. Concentrate on the deeper backwater areas or low current sloughs near woody structure and brushpiles.

Volga Lake, **Fayette** – Fish the riprap on the dam in spring for 9- to 11-inch fish; work the large submerged brush piles in summer.



walleyes

overlook this fine river when planning your next walleye outing. Good numbers up to 24 inches.

Turkey River, **Howard, Winneshiek and Fayette**

– Numbers of wall-

shorelines. Fish early morning and late afternoon to avoid heavy boat traffic on this narrow Maquoketa River impoundment.

Lake Hendricks, **Howard** – High numbers of bass up to 16 inches.

Mississippi River, **Pools 9-14**

– Strong numbers of largemouth bass exist in the Mississippi River. Bigmouths often change locations throughout the year. Bass reside in low current backwaters in the cold seasons and many move into flowing sloughs and channels and even onto near-channel wingdams in the warmer months.

Martens Lake, **Bremer**

– These bass grow large and

Cedar River, **Black Hawk** – Good walleye fishing below the dam in Waterloo in fall and early winter. Trophy-size fish caught every year.

Cedar River, **Bremer** – Fisheries surveys indicate good survival of stocked walleyes from recent years. Good numbers of 15-inch-plus walleyes available.

Cedar River, **Floyd and Mitchell** – A consistent producer for quality walleye angling; populations maintained through annual fingerling stockings. Mississippi River, **Pools 9-15** – The 2005 walleye fishery was slower than 2004, but the population is still good. Strong year classes of young walleyes coming on bodes well for future years.

Shellrock River, **Butler** – Don't

eyes have increased greatly since fingerling stockings were initiated in 2000.

Wapsipinicon River, **Buchanan**

– Annual stockings have made this river a consistent producer of abundant and quality-size fish.

largemouth bass

George Wyth Lake, **Black Hawk** – What this population lacks in numbers it

makes up for in size. Bass 18 to 19 inches available.

Lake Delhi, Delaware – There is a good year-class of bass 12 to 15 inches present. Fish the fallen woody structure along rocky

fast in this shallow water lake; fish the structure along the dike. Eurasian milfoil present so remove all vegetation from

boat and trailer before leaving.

northern pike

Mississippi River, **Pools 9-11** – Robust populations, but can be hard to locate; work the back-waters right after ice-out; in the hot summer months, they seek out springs or coldwater tributaries and loaf in these cooler waters.

Turkey River, **Howard** – Annual fingerling plants are producing a quality population. Some big fish are caught annually.

northwest & northcentral

Iowa

By Thomas Gengerke, Regional Fisheries Supervisor

walleye

Clear Lake, **Cerro Gordo** – Harvest was down in 2005, but should recover some in 2006. A fall electrofishing survey showed good numbers of 14- to 16-inch fish.

Iowa River, **Hardin** – 2005 survey revealed excellent numbers of 1-pound fish, with walleye up to 10 pounds collected.

Des Moines River, **Kossuth & Humboldt** – Both the East and West Forks have produced good catches in the spring and fall in recent years.

Silver Lake, **Dickinson** – Good numbers of 13- to 18-inch fish will be creel. Excellent opportunities exist to catch a trophy-sized fish. Try crank baits in July.

Five Island Lake, **Palo Alto** – Smaller fish will enter the creel in 2006. Good walleye growth will sustain the fishery.

Spirit Lake, **Dickinson** – Good numbers of 14-inch and larger fish

available. In the spring, fish after dark. Later in the season fish a jig and a minnow through the weeds or cast and retrieve a nightcrawler.

Storm Lake, **Buena Vista** – Good population. Males average 19 inches while females average 20.7 inches in the spring. Troll

crankbaits or vertically jig along the new dredge cuts. Don't forget that there is a 15-inch length limit with only one fish over 22 inches allowed per day.

yellow perch

Rice Lake, **Winnebago** – Good fall and winter fishery.

Silver Lake, **Worth** – Dense population, sorting required, fish up to 10 inches collected in 2005 survey.

Lake Cornelia, **Wright** – Nice size fish (10-inch-plus), but don't expect many limits.

Spirit Lake, **Dickinson** – Yellow perch anglers will see an upswing to the fishery, as good numbers of fish will be available during the 2006 season. Yellow perch 9 to 10.5 inches will be common in the catch and will sustain the fishery for the fall.

bullheads

North Twin Lake, **Calhoun** – Huge numbers of quality bullheads. Lot's of fish over a pound in last year's survey.

Black Hawk Lake, **Sac** – Bullheads and lot's of them sum up the fishing potential. Most fish are between 7.5 and 8.5 inches.



Dog Creek Lake, **O'Brien** – This small lake again has the potential to provide anglers quality fishing during 2006. Fish the north and west ends of the lake early in the season.

Silver Lake, **Dickinson** – You can “fill the bucket” at Silver Lake with good numbers of large fish.

Center Lake, **Dickinson** – Fewer bullheads will be caught in 2006; however, anglers will continue to harvest fish approaching 12 inches.

Crystal Lake, **Hancock** – High density of three-quarter-pound fish.

Rice Lake, **Winnebago** – Spring-time, shortly after ice-out will produce good results.

channel catfish

Scharnberg Pond, **Clay** – Good numbers of “nice” size channel catfish are available from this county area. Traditional baits are in order; however, don’t overlook live bait such as nightcrawlers.

Silver Lake, **Dickinson** – Virtually untapped fishery. Try fishing at night with live bait such as chubs or crawlers and a bonus walleye may be added to the stringer.

Ingham Lake, **Emmet** – Excellent angling during 2006. Restocked in 2001, these fish have had excellent growth with good numbers of fish 15 to 17 inches available.

Storm Lake, **Buena Vista** – Try fishing a bobber and live bait around the islands in May and

June and drifting a leech or crawler in the summer months. Lot’s of fish!

Brown’s Lake, **Woodbury** – Catfish in the 1- to 5-pound range and in excellent body condition abound in this oxbow lake of western Iowa.

Boone River, **Hamilton** – Scenic river with lot’s of fish between one-half and 2 pounds.

Iowa River, **Hardin** – 2005 survey showed good numbers of fish in the 3 to 5 pound range.

Lake Cornelia, **Wright** – High density of fish that are underutilized.

Crystal Lake, **Hancock** – 2005 netting survey revealed an abundant population of 1- to 2-pound catfish.

bluegills

Upper Pine Lake, **Hardin** – Dense population, with many over 7 inches.

Eldred Sherwood, **Hancock** – Lot’s of nice fish caught on the weed line in 2005.

Brushy Creek, **Webster** – Huge year class of 8- to 9-inch bluegills. 2006 should be a banner year. In May and June fish the north end.

North Twin, **Calhoun** – Lot’s of big ‘gills in this lake. Fish in the shade of the docks during the summer and fall with a little leadhead.

Yellow Smoke Lake, **Crawford** – Drift fishing a small leadhead tipped with a waxworm is a great way to catch the 8- 10-inch bluegills in Yellow Smoke.

Dog Creek Lake, **O'Brien** – Fish the submerged shallow water timber during the spring. Growth throughout the summer will provide an upswing to the fishery from now through the 2007 season.

Lake Pahoja, **Lyon** – Quality (6 to 8 inches) size fish dominate the catch.

Center Lake, **Dickinson** – Fish near the overhanging and submerged brush. Density on the upswing.

crappie

Black Hawk Lake, **Sac** – Fall fishing is just as good as spring so anglers have two prime times to catch a mess of nice crappie. Fish average 8 to 10 inches but 14-inch fish are available.

Crawford Creek Lake, **Ida** – Drift fishing using a small leadhead tipped with live bait is very effective in locating and catching crappie in this 62-acre prairie lake.

Beeds Lake, **Franklin** – Excellent numbers of both white and black crappie in the 7- to 9-inch range.



Briggs Woods Lake, **Hamilton** – Eight- to 9-inch crappies provide year round angling.

Lower Pine Lake, **Hardin** – Fish downed trees along shoreline in spring and drift fish in open water during the summer.

Spirit Lake, **Dickinson** – 2005 was the best in years. Fish the north end shore, Hales and Templar Lagoon in the spring.

largemouth bass

Brushy Creek Lake, **Webster** – One of the state's hottest bass lakes. Good water quality plus habit equals good bass numbers.

Spirit Lake, **Dickinson** – Anglers will experience excellent catches of fish greater than 15 inches; however, anglers are strongly urged to practice catch-and-release of this predator species.

Upper Pine Lake, **Hardin** – Good size structure, with many fish greater than 3 pounds.

Smith Lake, **Kossuth** – High density of football-size bass observed in 2005 survey.

smallmouth bass

Spirit Lake, **Dickinson** – Fine population of "smallies." Action begins shortly after ice-out around shallow rock piles on sunny, calm days using jigs and minnows. As the water warms the fish disperse to deeper rock piles and emerging weeds and can be caught with live bait and artificials.

West Okoboji, **Dickinson** – Consistent producer. Fish are 15 inches and larger. Rocks are the key early with rocks, weeds and weed lines productive in the summer. Leeches are a good summer bait.

Iowa River, **Hardin** – Forty percent of the fish collected in 2005 survey were 12 inches or greater.

Boone River, **Hamilton** – Fish over 18 inches collected in most recent survey.

northern pike

Spirit Lake, **Dickinson** – Good numbers of angler-acceptable

size fish and larger will be common to the Spirit Lake angler. An indicator of this increased pike population is the steadily increasing net catches of this species during walleye brood stock netting operations.

West Okoboji, **Dickinson** – Good numbers of large fish are caught every winter. During the open water season fish early and late in the season for the best results and use large baits such as chubs or large artificial baits.

Winnebago River, **Winnebago, Hancock, Worth, Cerro Gordo** – Stocked with fingerlings annually. Produces nice fish both spring and fall.

Iowa River, **Hardin** – Three- to 6-pound fish observed in survey between Alden and Iowa Falls.

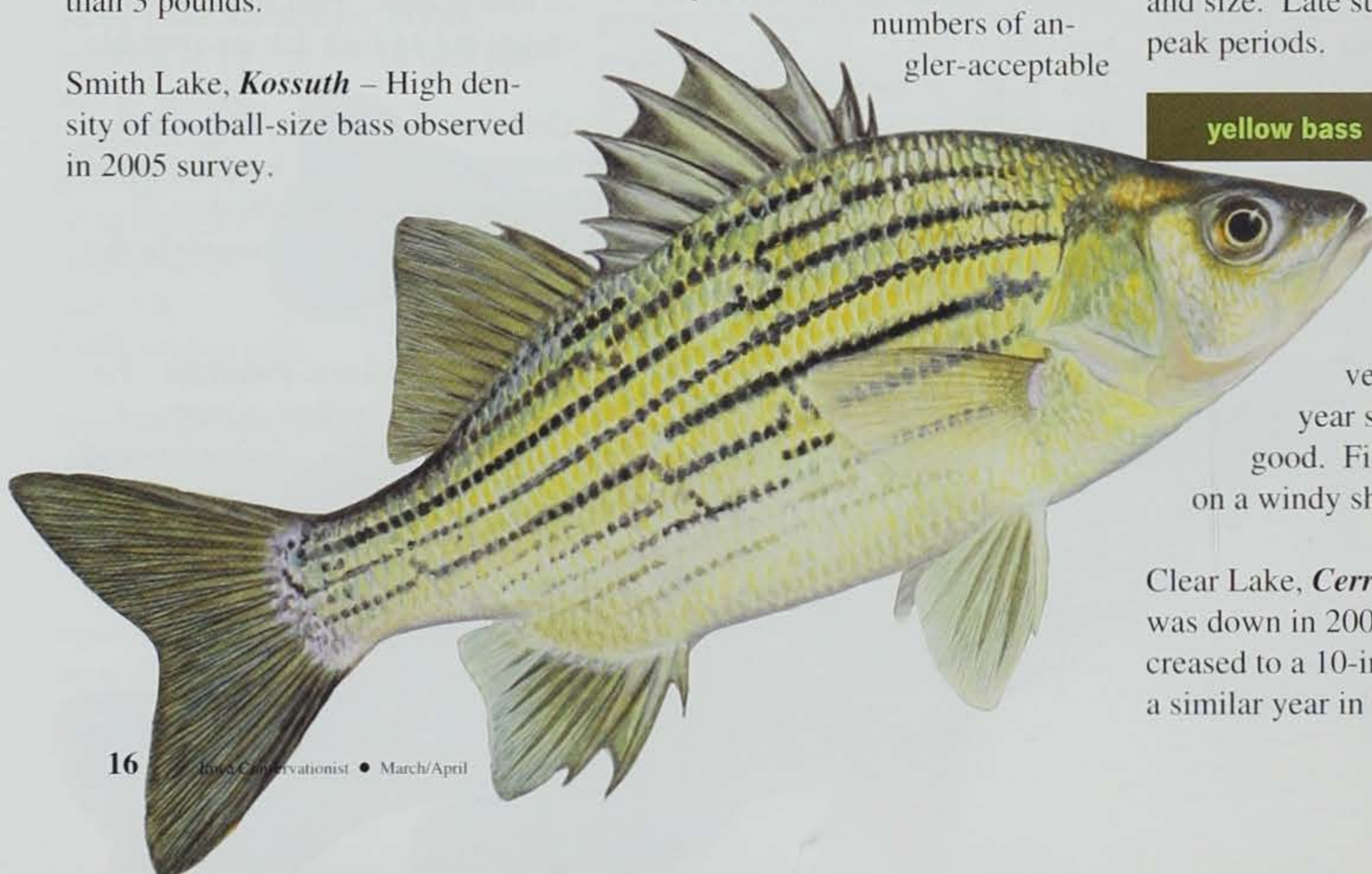
muskellunge

Muskie populations in Clear Lake, **Cerro Gordo**, Spirit and West Okoboji, **Dickinson**, and Brushy Creek, **Webster** have matured in numbers and size. Late summer and fall are peak periods.

yellow bass

Black Hawk Lake, **Sac** – Thousands of yellow bass harvested in 2005. This year should be just as good. Fish a small leadhead on a windy shoreline.

Clear Lake, **Cerro Gordo** – Harvest was down in 2005; however, size increased to a 10-inch average. Expect a similar year in 2006.



southeast

iowa

By Steve Waters, Regional Fisheries Supervisor

bluegill

Belva Deer Lake, **Keokuk** – Lots of 7- to 10-inch fish.

Lake Sugema, **Van Buren** – Tremendous numbers of 7- to 9-inch fish. Habitat galore!

Lake Wapello, **Davis** – Excellent numbers of 8- to 9-inch fish. Plentiful rock and woody habitat as well as vegetation.

Indian Lake, **Van Buren** – Excellent quality; 8- to 10-inch fish.

Hawthorn Lake, **Mahaska** – Good numbers of 7- to 9-inch fish

Farm Ponds, all counties – Mostly private water; best place for a trophy.

Lake Geode, **Henry** – Good numbers of 7- to 9-inch fish with 10-inch fish present.

Lake Odessa, **Louisa** – Lots of 7- to 9-inch fast growing fish; find woody areas.

Shimek Ponds, **VanBuren** – Seven to 9-inch fish common; five ponds.

Diamond Lake, **Poweshiek** – Seven- to 9-inch fish off jetties and around brush piles.

crappie

Coralville Reservoir, **Linn** – Fish around downed trees or vertical jig rocky shorelines; 10- to 14 inch fish common.

Lake Macbride, **Johnson** – Gobs of 8- to 10-inch fish.

Hawthorn Lake, **Mahaska** – Abundant 8- to 10 inch fish.

Iowa Lake, **Iowa** – Good numbers of 9- to 11-inch fish.

Mississippi River, Big Timber area – Eight- to 10-inch fish common; big fish present.

Lake Odessa, **Louisa** – Abundant 10- to 12-inch fish; some trophies.

Rathbun Lake, **Appanoose** – Excellent numbers of 9- to 11-inch fish; a must-go-to lake.

Lake Miami, **Monroe** – Tons of 8- to 10 inch fish.

Indian Lake, **Van Buren** – Nine- to 11-inch fish with 12- to 14 inch available.

Lake Darling, **Washington** – Nine- to 11-inch are common; big fish swimming.

largemouth bass

Mississippi River, Big Timber – Great numbers, all sizes.

Lake Odessa, **Louisa** – Good numbers of fish up to 22 inches.

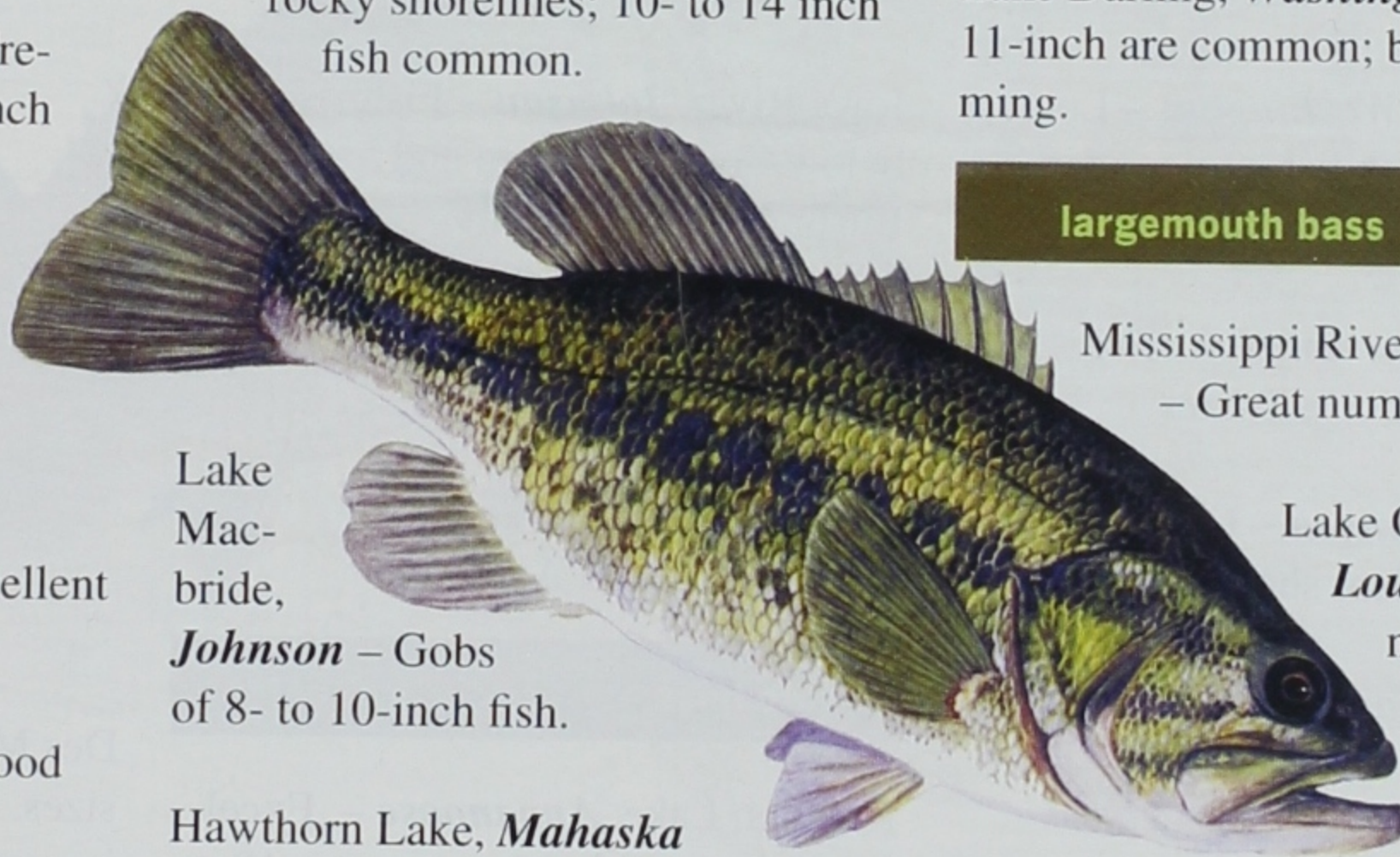
Lake Miami, **Monroe** – Excellent numbers-all sizes; fish submerged timber.

Lake Wapello, **Davis** – No-kill regulation; many 12- to 15-inch fish and some reach 20 inches.

Hawthorn Lake, **Mahaska** – Great population of 12- to 22-inch fish.

Lake Sugema, **Van Buren** – Twelve- to 18-inch protected slot limit; numerous 11- to 17-inch fish.

Pleasant, Creek **Linn** – Lots of 12- to 16-inch fish; 18-inch minimum size limit.



Lake Macbride, **Johnson** – Good numbers-all sizes; lots of new habitat and Kentucky spotted bass present

Diamond Lake, **Poweshiek** – Good numbers of 2- to 4 pound fish; target pallets.

Farm Ponds, **all counties** – Best chance for a trophy; mostly private water.

channel catfish

Mississippi River, **Pools 16-19** – Best catfish hole in the state.

Lake Darling, **Washington** – Lots of 15- to 19-inch fish; 9-pounders present.

Coralville Reservoir, **Johnson** – Excellent population-all sizes

Kent Park, **Johnson** – Outstanding angling; excellent shoreline access.

Otter Creek, **Tama** – Lots of 14- to 20-inch fish.

Rathbun Lake, **Appanoose** – Exceptional fishery; they're everywhere; all sizes

Most Interior Rivers – Exceptional fishery-all sizes; fish snag areas.

Hawthorn Lake, **Mahaska** – Excellent fishery with fish up to 25 inches.

Corydon Lake, **Wayne** – Abundant numbers due to the cage catfish program.

Lake Miami, Monroe – Excellent numbers-all sizes.

walleye

Rathbun Reservoir, **Appanoose** – Excellent fishery; late spring/summer is best.

Mississippi River, **lock and dam 15 and 17** – Great tailwater fishery; fish move to wing dams in summer.

Iowa River, **Johnson** – Fish below Coralville Dam and Burlington Street Dam in Iowa City.

Wapsi River, **Linn and Jones** – Fish below dams at Central City and Anamosa.

white bass

Rathbun Lake, **Appanoose** – Excellent fishery with fish averaging 10 to 14 inches.

Mississippi River – Fish below

locks and dam and wing dams; plentiful.

Pleasant Creek, **Linn** – Look for schools feeding on surface in summer; 16-inch fish common.

flathead catfish

Skunk River (all stretches) – This popular fishery is easy to fish because of its size.

Mississippi River, **pools 16-19** – Best below locks and dams and side channels.



Des Moines rivers – Good for all sizes. Look for big fish in holes during summer and around drift piles and bridge pilings.

red ear sunfish

Lake Geode, **Henry** – Fish have been sampled up to 11 1/2 in.

Lake Wapello, **Davis** – Good numbers of 8-12 in. fish.

Lake Sugema, **Van Buren** – Good numbers of 8-12 in. fish.

southwest iowa

By Andy Moore, Regional Fisheries Supervisor

bluegill

Big Creek, *Polk* – Seven- to 9-inch fish available; fish small jigs and crawlers near the jet-ties and spawning beds.

Greenfield Lake, *Adair*
– Good numbers of 7- to 9-inch fish.

Littlefield Lake, *Audubon*
– Eight- to 9-inch fish common; Fish near shoreline spawning beds or try summer drift fishing.

Fogle Lake, *Ringgold*
– Seven- to 8-inch common; most predictable catch.

Green Valley, *Union*
– Seven and one-half- to 8 1/2- inch fish common.



crappie

Red Rock Lake, *Marion* – Eleven- to 15-inch fish, fish feeder stream coves and the dam area if water quality is good.



Nodaway Lake, *Adair*

– Good numbers of 8- to 10-inch fish; find the brush piles.



largemouth bass

Mormon Trail, *Adair*

– All sizes up to 18 inches.

West Lake, *Clarke* – All sizes; 14- to 17-inches common.

Ahquabi Lake, *Warren* – Good population of 15-inch-plus bass.

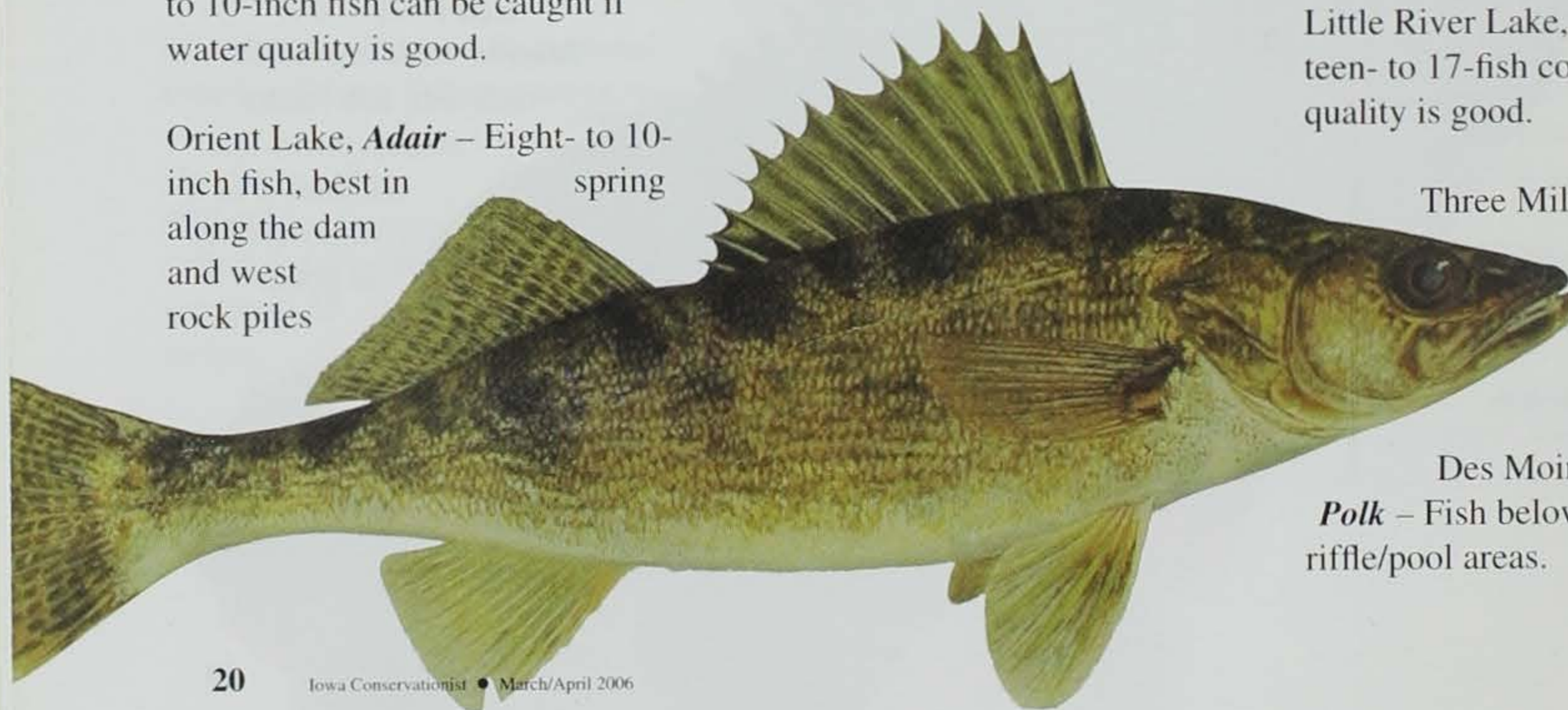
Blue Heron Lake, *Polk* – Good numbers, large bass available.

Three Mile Lake, *Union* – Eight- to 11-inch fish common; Fish near the dam and in the flooded timber.

Little River Lake, *Decatur* – Eight- to 10-inch fish can be caught if water quality is good.

Orient Lake, *Adair* – Eight- to 10-inch fish, best in spring along the dam and west rock piles

Prairie Rose Lake, *Shelby* – Large 14- to 20-inch fish; trophy fishery.



channel catfish

Prairie Rose Lake, *Shelby* – High numbers of 3- to 6-pound fish; large flatheads also available.

Green Valley Lake, *Union* – All sizes up to 30 inches.

Nine Eagles Lake, *Decatur* – Large numbers, average 14 to 25

inches.

Rock Creek Lake, *Jasper* – Good population of 16- to 20-inch fish.

Greenfield Lake, *Adair* – Large numbers of 2-pound fish

walleye

Lake Manawa, *Pottawattamie* – Good numbers of all sizes.

Saylorville Lake, *Polk* – fifteen- to 20-inch fish; try Cherry Glen to the marina.

Little River Lake, *Decatur* – Thirteen- to 17-inch fish common if water quality is good.

Three Mile Lake, *Union* – All sizes with plenty of fish exceeding 26 inches.

Des Moines River, *Boone, Polk* – Fish below dams and in riffle/pool areas.

hiddenjewel

2006

northeast

By Bill Kalishek, biologist

The Cedar River in Mitchell County, from the town of Mitchell downstream, offers excellent angling for native populations of smallmouth bass and channel catfish. Annual stockings of fingerling walleye and northern pike also provide great fishing. It's best to float the river in a canoe or walk the Cedar River Greenbelt Trail from highway 9 to Mitchell or the Spring Park Trails. Interstate Park at Mitchell (modern facilities) and Spring Park near Osage (primitive camping) provide riverside accommodations.

northwest

By Jim Christianson, biologist

Lake Pahoja, Lyon County, is a 70-acre man-made lake that provides hours of recreation for the outdoor enthusiast. The fishing clientele is rather localized, probably due to its location in extreme northwestern Iowa. With recent fish management activities, the bluegill and crappie fisheries should expand and provide some good angling. This, along with some very good channel catfish fishing, will make this lake an angler's destination. The park area

adjacent to the lake is managed by the Lyon County Conservation Board and provides many amenities, including camping pads, cabins, trails, a beach, playgrounds, boat rentals and a covered fishing pier.

southeast

By Don Kline, biologist

Yenrougis Pond lays just 2 miles north of Sigourney. The rugged landscape of the abandoned rock quarry compliments the crystal clear water. Anglers will find healthy populations of bluegills, black crappies, largemouth bass, channel catfish and redear sunfish. Expect to catch a bunch of nice size fish of all species. Just vary your tackle and bait to fit the species of fish. Try a small hook and pinch of worm for panfish, flashy spinner baits for bass and smelly stink baits for catfish. Dabble along the shoreline or work the deeper water in a canoe or float tube. A gravel ramp is available for small boats with electric motors. Bring a picnic

or plan a primitive camp out in this quiet scenic area.

southwest

By Gary Sobotka, biologist

Nine Eagles Lake is a 56-acre lake hidden in Decatur County near Davis City. The lake has good populations of bluegill, largemouth bass and an underused population of channel catfish. Along with this, an excellent state park with good camping facilities is available.



Nine Eagles Lake

tophunch 2006

northeast

By Bryan Hayes, biologist

A catch-and-release regulation on smallmouth bass in a four mile segment of the Maquoketa River



Lake McBride

starting just below Lake Delhi Dam was implemented almost 20 years ago. The first 10 years of the regulation anglers witnessed an incredible increase in numbers and size of smallmouth bass. A string of low reproduction-years in the middle 1990s caused a downturn in the population that a catch-and-release regulation couldn't prevent. The smallmouth bass fishing in this segment is a top hunch for 2006 because of the rebounding numbers witnessed in last fall's fishery survey. Numbers and size are back. Anglers can access this area by small jon-boat, canoe or wading this scenic stretch of river in Delaware County.

northwest

By Lannie Miller, biologist

North Twin Lake in Calhoun County has it all. It has great fishing for a variety of fish, including bluegills and crappies up to 10 inches, yellow

bass by the boat load, bullheads weighing more than a pound, walleye in the 2-pound-plus class and unlimited channel cat fishing. Combine this with excellent water clarity and you have the makings of a great outdoor adventure. Shoreline fishing is available but boat anglers will have the advantage.

southeast

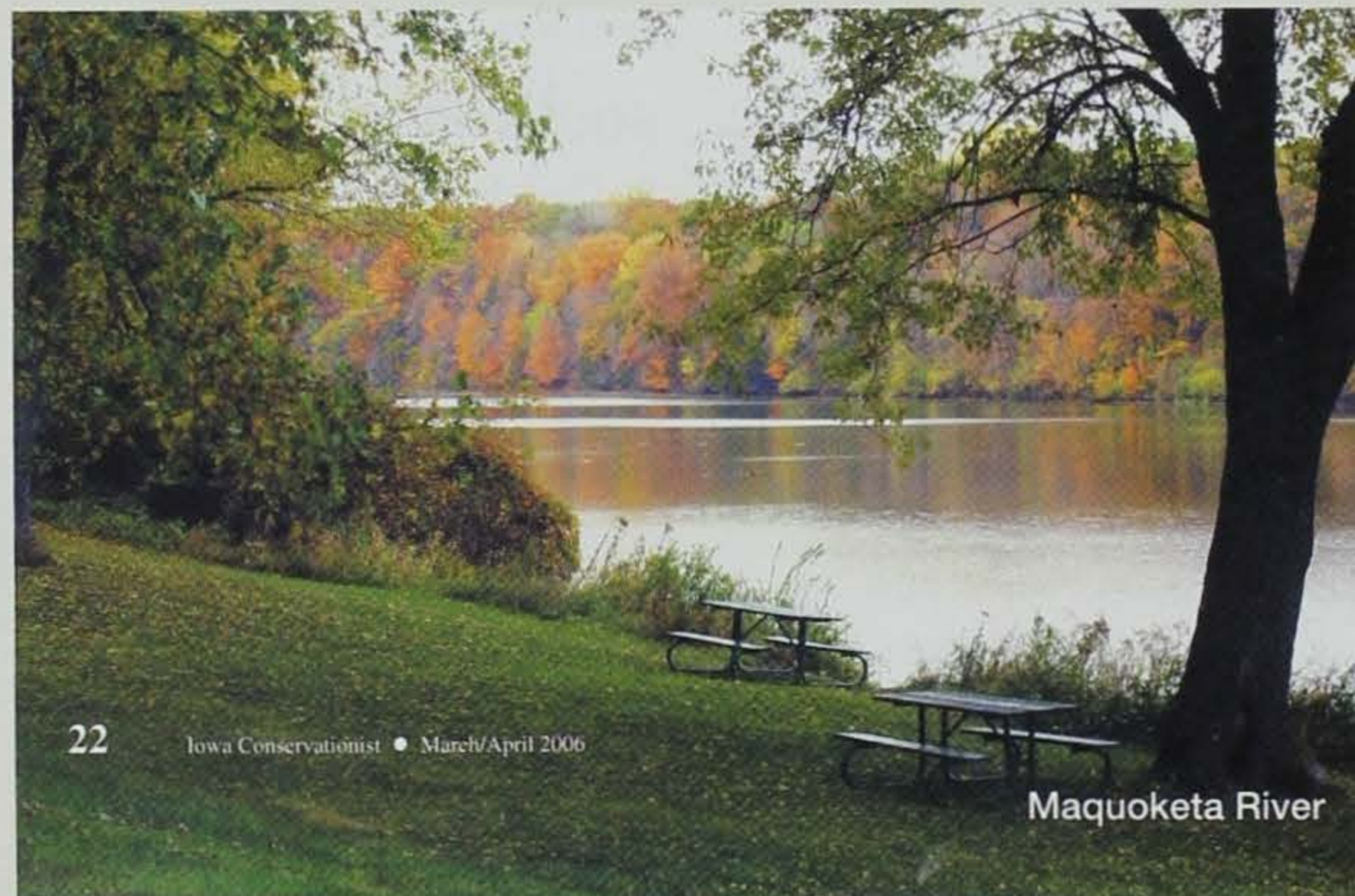
By Paul Sleeper, biologist

All indications point toward a banner year for panfish at Lake Macbride. If you want to catch lots of bluegill, than Lake Macbride is the place to go. Most bluegills at Macbride will be around 6 to 7 inches and can be caught near the brush piles all year. There is also a strong year class of crappie from 8 to 10 inches. Fish these crappie in shallow brush in the spring and late fall. In the summer months crappie move away from the shorelines and suspend over deeper water. Macbride is a shoreline anglers dream spot with numerous hiking trails that will take you around most of the lake.

southwest

By Chris Larson, biologist

Lake Anita in Cass County is a good bet for excellent bluegill, largemouth bass and channel catfish fishing if the lake fills in the spring. The fish population was renovated in 2003 and additional fish habitat placed in the lake bottom, however fishing has been limited because the lake has been about 3 feet low for two years. If the lake does not fill, a temporary boat ramp will be constructed to improve access.



Maquoketa River

riverrat

2006

northeast

By Mark Winn, technician

The scenic Wapsipinicon River flowing through northeast Iowa offers diverse fishing opportunities for anglers and should be a top priority for anglers this coming season. Whether after northern pike, walleye, smallmouth bass, channel catfish or an occasional nice creel of crappies, this river offers all types of diverse habitats holding good numbers and sizes of fish. These species, with the exception of walleyes, are all self-sustaining naturally reproducing populations. Accessing fish in the "Wapsi" can be as easy as throwing on a pair of old sneakers and wading in Bremer County, or floating a jonboat in Buchanan County.

northwest

By Jim Wahl, biologist

The Iowa River in Hardin County is one of the most scenic rivers in Iowa and offers some of the best fishing as well. Limestone rock provides rock-rubble substrate throughout the county, which is the preferred habitat for smallmouth bass. Channel catfish and northern pike also inhabit the river and

provide self-sustaining populations. Walleye fingerlings are stocked annually and have produced outstanding

fishing in recent years. Access is excellent with an abundance of public approaches throughout the county. Many anglers prefer to fish by canoe or small jonboat, however much of the stream is wadeable.

southeast

By Bernie Schonhoff, biologist

What makes the Mississippi River the best place for a fishing adventure no matter what you're after? DIVERSITY. The Mighty Mississippi has something for everyone. You like catfish? Channel or flathead catfish, and bullheads, the Mississippi has them all. Like your fish with scales? Largemouth and smallmouth bass, the river has them both — just ask the ESPN/BASS tournament anglers

headed there this year. White bass are abundant and they're willing biters, especially in the tailwaters in the spring. People often associate walleye and sauger with the northern lakes country, but they're in the river in good numbers. Whether it's crappies, bluegills or perch, the backwaters have plenty of panfish as well.

southwest

By Andy Moore, supervisor

Two rivers, the Des Moines in Boone and Polk counties and the Middle Raccoon from Panora to Redfield in Guthrie and Dallas counties, are excellent fishing destinations. The Des Moines can be good for walleye, channel catfish, white bass and hybrid striped bass. Fishing can be good below the various low head dams in the Des Moines area and below the Saylorville and Red Rock dams into Marion County. The Middle Raccoon has very good walleye and smallmouth bass (catch-and-releaseonly) fishing. New habitat has been constructed in the river above the highway P28 access.



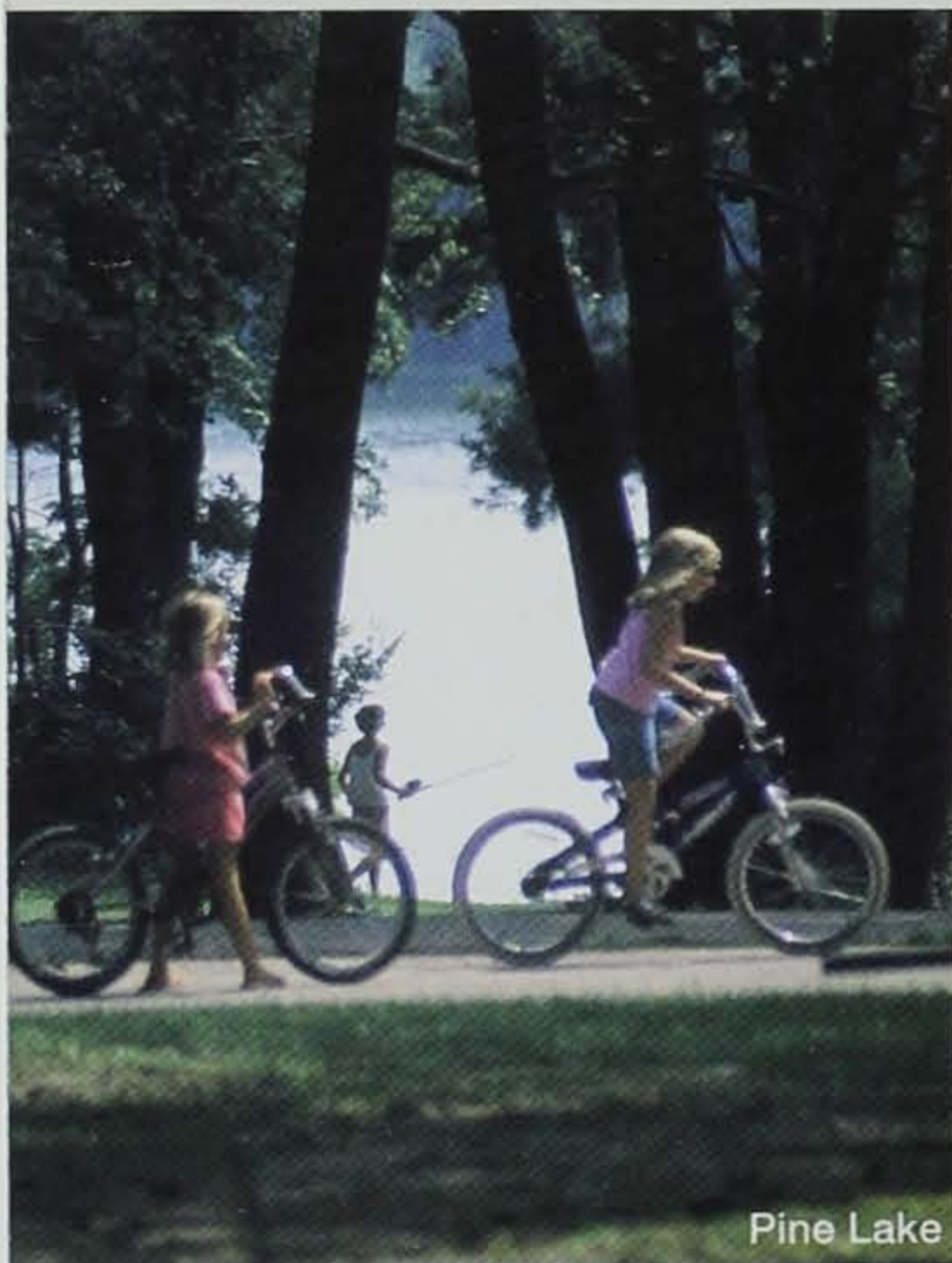
Mississippi River

worthmore than a day 2006

northeast

By Scott Gritters, biologist

You can maximize a couple fishing days up the Great River Road along the upper Mississippi River. The road runs along the eastern border of Iowa and connects with our neighboring states. Pick any section of the Great River Road and you can spend a couple quality days along the Mississippi River. This summer however, try concentrating on a trip from Guttenberg to Marquette. This section of the roadtrip has numerous fishing sites, great sightseeing and



Pine Lake

Guttenberg river walkway, Bussey Lake fishing float, Pikes Peak State Park, Effigy Mounds National Monument, Sny Magill and Bloody Run trout stream.

northwest

By Jim Wahl, biologist

Upper and Lower Pine lakes, located one-half mile east of Eldora, will provide some of the best bass fishing in northern Iowa. Both of these lakes support bass in the 6- to 7-pound range, with good numbers exceeding 3 pounds. If you prefer panfish, crappie and bluegill are abundant in both lakes. The Iowa River is within a stones throw of the lower lake dam and produces good catches of smallmouth bass, channel catfish and an occasional walleye or pike. Camping is available at Pine Lake State Park on the upper lake and rental cabins are available on the Iowa River.

small river towns that are big on hospitality. Some must see spots to visit are the Guttenberg aquarium,

southeast

By Mark Flammang, biologist

It's one of Iowa's largest lakes and has the fishing quality to match. Year-in and year-out Lake Rathbun (Appanoose County) is recognized across Iowa and the Midwest as one of the great "go to" places for the crappie enthusiast, and 2006 will bring an abundance of 10- to 12-inch crappies. How about spending a day or two more chasing the walleye on Lake Rathbun? The all-time record for walleye harvest at Rathbun was set last year, with great numbers of 15- to 21-inch fish common.

southwest

By Dick McWilliams, biologist

The Polk County area offers enough fishing to last more than a day. Gray's, Easter, Big Creek, Blue Heron and Saylorville lakes, with a combined 6,800 acres of water, offer fishing for everything from channel catfish to hybrid striped bass to bluegill. Add the Des Moines River in Polk County into the mix, and excellent fishing with good access is readily available. Good lodging and restaurant accommodations, plus entertainment, make this area very inviting.



Mississippi River

familyvacation spot 2006

northeast

By Bryan Hayes, biologist

Backbone State Park was Iowa's first dedicated state park back in 1920. As it was then, it remains one of the great family vacation spots in Iowa. Activities at the park and in surrounding communities are well worth planning a vacation around. Anglers can take fish from the well-stocked trout stream in the park, which is a popular place on Saturdays throughout the summer when the stocking truck arrives. The kids enjoy seeing the fish released into the stream and then going after 'em. Scenic Backbone Lake can add some variety to the creel. The good largemouth bass fishing from last year will likely carry over to 2006. All the accommodations needed for a memorable family vacation can be found within the park, and the scenery is priceless. Area events of interest include: Strawberry Days, June 9-11, Strawberry Point; Edgewood Rodeo Days, June 22-25, Edgewood; Delaware County Fair, July 10-16, Manchester; and the 25th Annual Backbone Bluegrass Festival, July 28-30. For more information, visit the Area Chamber of Commerce websites at; www.strawberrypoint.com or www.manchesteriowa.org.

northwest

By Jim Wahl, biologist

There's something for everyone in the family at Clear Lake. Walleye, yellow bass, channel catfish, bullhead or even a muskie provides the angler plenty of opportunities on this 3,700-acre natural lake. Three public swim beaches are available, as well as water skiing and sailing. If you don't care for water activities, shop the many antique stores in downtown Clear Lake, or spend some time on one of three golf courses. Visitors are treated to special events at City Park nearly every weekend throughout the summer, and the Lady of the Lake tour boat is docked across the street. Several campgrounds and lodging facilities are available on or near the lake.

southeast

By Mark Flammang, biologist

Renovated in 1993, Lake Wapello in Davis County provides outstanding angling for bluegill (8- and 9-inch fish are common) and largemouth bass. Largemouth bass are extremely abundant and provide tremendous catch-and-releas-only angling. Camping spots are abundant and the recently



Backbone State Park



Three Fires Lake

renovated cabins provide a quiet and comfortable get away. Don't forget the lodge and restaurant on the lakeshore. Wapello is also a short drive from the historic Bloomfield town square.

southwest

By Gary Sobotka, biologist

Three Fires Lake in Taylor County is 80 acres and has great facilities for the family. Besides a new and rapidly growing fish population, there is tent camping and cabins, a swimming beach, playground, and best of all, there is excellent water quality.



Tournament FISHING

by Mick Klemesrud

Think back to the early 1980s. The nation is just coming off a horrible disco hangover, sky-high inflation is subsiding and bell-bottom pants are finally gone for good. It is also the decade when stock car racing began an unprecedented growth in popularity across the country. Fans began placing their favorite carburetor or lift kit brand stickers on their own car windows, just like their favorite drivers.

Now jump forward 15 years. Driving west along highway 34 you get passed by a truck pulling a boat with a matching paint job, and a Bassmaster sticker and one for Berkley fishing line and Bass Pro Shops and Lowrance electronics and Mercury motors and . . . you get the picture. What's happened to car racing in the 1980s is happening to tournament fishing. Exposure is drawing in fans, the fans want to play like the guys they see on TV and the fishing tournaments follow.

Iowa lakes and rivers hosted more than 630 fishing tournaments in 2004, and the trend is for more. By 2007 when Twelve-Mile Lake and Lake

Icaria get back from major renovations, that number could surpass 700.

Fishing tournaments are not only becoming more numerous, but along with the participants, more sophisticated. This evolution has also occurred with their relationship with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources. Once considered in some circles as adversaries, fishing clubs and tournament anglers now work with the DNR to improve, protect and promote fishing in Iowa.

Lannie Miller, fisheries biologist with the Iowa DNR and head of the state fishing tournament committee, said in general the DNR and folks hosting and fishing in the tournaments have a pretty good working relationship.

Miller, whose district covers west-central Iowa and includes the wildly popular Brushy Creek Lake, said state fisheries staff has worked on a lot of fish habitat projects with the club members, who have also raised and donated money to the projects.

"We've had some really good cooperation with them," Miller said.

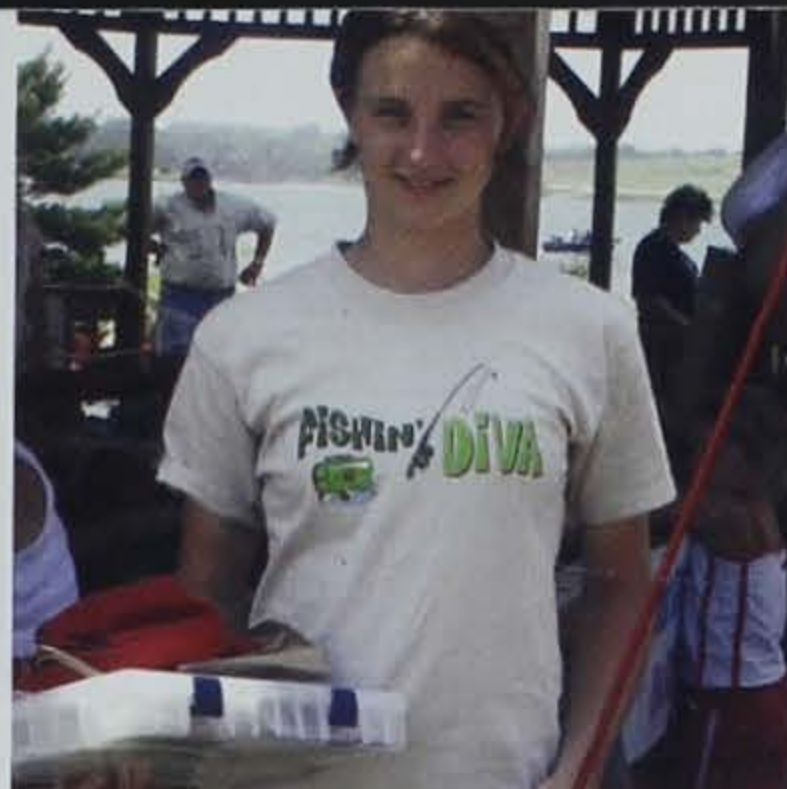
"We need to balance the public use of the lake and they understand that."

The DNR requires fishing tournaments that have six or more boats, 12 or more participants or who charge an entry fee or have prizes, to submit an application to the area fish management biologist. (The numbers are different for tournaments on the Mississippi River.) With the number of fishing tournaments increasing, scheduling tournaments becomes more competitive.

Miller saves one weekend day each month at Brushy Creek with no fishing tournaments, and he varies the day each month. He also tries to keep holiday weekends free from fishing tournaments.

In southwest Iowa, Three-Mile Lake had 49 bass fishing tournaments in 2004, but none on Mother's Day, Father's Day, Memorial Day, Labor Day or the Fourth of July. Gary Sobotka, fisheries biologist at Mt. Airy whose district includes Three-Mile Lake, has nearly 25 percent of all fishing tournaments in Iowa in his district. Sobotka takes a different approach than Miller. He looks at the

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number of boats that are projected for each tournament and tries to keep it as close to 25 as he can. If there are two smaller tournaments totalling about 25 boats, he would probably allow both on the same weekend.

"I try to schedule as many tournaments as I can fit in," Sobotka said. "The fishery is the anglers' resource and it is our job to make it meet the anglers' demands. If we can't make the biology work, then we have to slow the tournaments down."

Part of the responsibility of a tournament director is to send in a report that includes how many fish were caught, the number of short fish caught and the number that died. Sobotka said he has some groups that do a good job keeping fish alive and others that could try a little harder.

So far, Sobotka said fishing tournaments have not harmed West Lake Osceola, but he said the impact on Three-Mile is unknown. Three-Mile is a fairly new lake and Sobotka is not seeing as many young fish coming into the system.

Fishing clubs and tournament anglers are keenly aware of the scrutiny from fellow anglers, and have taken great strides to improve the way they handle the tournament, the way they handle the fish and the way they interact with others on the water. These anglers want the resource to be as good as possible, and they are

working to minimize the stress and mortality on the fish.

Jay Walton is the conservation director of Iowa Bass Anglers (a B.A.S.S. Federation club) and has been fishing bass tournaments since 1990. His group works to improve fish survival through education of members. Walton said keeping fish alive serves their interest because it means they can keep doing what they love.

Walton and many of his fellow club and tournament anglers work to improve fish-handling procedures and have certain minimum requirements for live-wells. Members receive a booklet offering ways to keep mortality to a minimum, and if followed, claim to have 90 percent survival. The tips include changing water in the live-well, keeping the live-well full of water, proper hooking and handling techniques and so on. After the official weigh-in, fish are immediately boated to various points on the lake and released into deeper, cooler water.

Tournaments are not all weekend affairs with big fancy boats. Some lakes have a fishing league, which is just like a bowling league. Anglers meet on the same day each week, at the same time, at the same lake and fish for a few hours. They throw a few bucks in the hat and winner takes all. This goes on during the summer at West Lake Osceola and at Badger Creek Lake, to name a few.

So, what happens in a fishing tournament?

First, it depends on the type of tournament — club or open. Club tournaments usually have a lower entry fee, are conducted on a smaller scale and involve club members only. Open tournaments usually have a higher entry fee, have more competition, larger prizes and anyone can participate.

Tournaments involving club members range in size from a few boats up to 25. Tournaments, as part of the national circuit, can have as many as 50 to 60 boats. "You can take it to whatever level you want to take your fishing, get together with buddies and throw \$10 in a hat or try for the Bassmasters Classic," Walton said.

When Walton's club holds a tournament, members do not know who they will be fishing with until the day of the event. The first thing in the morning, they draw for partners. The angler — the person fishing from the front of the boat, and the co-angler — the person fishing from the back of the boat, will compete not against each other or as a team, but against the angler and co-angler in the other boats — angler vs. angler and co-angler vs. co-angler.

"You're not fishing against the guy in your boat, but against a competitor you can't even see," Walton said.



Photos, courtesy of Iowa Bass Anglers, feature 2005 fishing tournaments at Brushy Creek Lake, Lake Okoboji and the annual kids tournament at Three-Mile Lake. To view additional photos visit their web site at www.iowabassanglers.com

Blast-off is generally at first, safe light. Fishing will last for 8 hours (6 hours during hot weather). The angler and co-angler will discuss where to fish, when to move and so on, based on what they learned when they pre-fished the lake.

Fishing tournaments offer a lot of camaraderie, said Walton. Walton fishes about 20 tournaments a year from Spirit Lake to lakes in Missouri and up and down the Mississippi River. Tournament anglers try to stay in the same one or two hotels. After the competition is over, they all get together for some group fun. "That's the key to all this, having fun doing what we love to do," Walton said.

Kevin Stockman, of Ogden, is the director of Bass Stalkers bass tournaments and has been hosting fishing tournaments since the late 1980s. Stockman hosts open tournaments on lakes from Brushy Creek to Little River, and West Lake Osceola to the lakes in the Creston area. Anyone can enter an open

tournament, all they have to do is pay the fee and register.

Stockman said his tournaments begin with a boat check and safety equipment review. Each team must read and sign-off on the rules. Like other tournaments, anglers fish for six to eight hours, then return for weigh-in. There is a competition for biggest bass and for total weight.

He said competitors are getting more and more sophisticated and when certain teams show up, you might as well hand them the prize money. He gets participants from all over Iowa, as well as neighboring states, and sees fishing tournaments as a way to introduce anglers to a lake they wouldn't normally travel to to fish.

Stockman said bass tournament anglers are a well-connected group and word spreads quickly when fishing is good. Like in 2004, Stockman hosted a tournament at Badger Creek, where the top three places were decided by 16 ounces, with the winner coming in at 26 pounds for six fish. Conversely, when Twelve-Mile was suffering through its yellow bass problem, word got around and the anglers and tournaments left.

Walton said he has noticed some changes to fishing tournaments over the years. Ethics have moved to the forefront, he said. Participants have to maintain certain standards—from the boat launch, to the way they catch and

release fish, to the way they treat other anglers in other boats and on shore.

"We worry about our public perception," Walton said.

There have also been obvious changes in technology. But, like Walton said, technology can only show where the fish are, you still have to convince them to strike.

One of the most important improvements, over the years, has been in the cooperation between the tournament anglers and directors, and the DNR and county fish and wildlife staff, which ultimately benefits the resource.

What does the future hold?

Stockman sees fishing tournament fading out quickly if the DNR requires all tournaments to become catch-and-release only. He said catch-and-release tournaments would be ripe for cheating and would eventually weed out the money tournaments.

Walton sees bass tournaments improving in both the quality of the resource and the events. There are only so many lakes in Iowa and only so many tournaments available. "We are trying to bring what the big boys do to the local level and have fun doing it," Walton said.

Mick Klemesrud is an information specialist with the department in Des Moines.

An Iowa Pro LIVES THE GOOD LIFE

Eric Naig was living his dream. He had reached the top of the Professional Walleye Trail (PWT) and was competing with, and defeating most of, the big boys. It had been 11 years of hard work, hustle and travel, but this Cylinder native had made the big time.

His journey to the pros started in college at Storm Lake, where he would pull planer boards around the lake catching walleyes. His passion led him to compete in the Clear Lake Classic and Easter Seals Great Walleye Weekend at the Iowa Great Lakes. Success in these local tournaments spawned a desire to try his luck against the best in the country.

During the winter of 1992, Naig was changing jobs and decided it was the perfect time to try fishing against the pros in a professional fishing tournament. He called to inquire about fishing as an amateur and was told "sorry kid, we have more amateurs than boats." The boat shortage was due to a pro angler shortage. The pro provides the boat and makes decisions on where to fish and when to move, and the amateur serves as co-angler and learns from the pro. Naig was asked about his equipment and boat, and voila, he was in his first event and was considered a pro.

Naig took his 16-foot Alumicraft to Lake Erie. "The weather couldn't have been more perfect," he said. "The lake was flat calm. It was like fishing Storm Lake, running planer boards." And he caught a lot of fish. "I finished in 15th place and thought 'man this was easy,'" he said.

Naig was a regular pro from 1993 through 2003. During that time, his schedule was . . . travel to the host



Photo courtesy of Pure Fishing

water, practice fish, fish the tournament, travel home and repeat. He would fish 12 events per year — five to seven on the PWT and five on the FLW Outdoors tour.

"I always like to get three days of solid practice in," he said. "There really isn't anybody out there who can't do well without practice." Practice is important for anglers to get a pattern on the walleyes, because the fish can be anywhere from 2 to 50 feet of water.

After pre-fishing the lake, the tournament would last three, sometimes four days. Add a travel day to each end of the event, and Naig would invest a minimum of eight days for each event. The PWT events were primarily in the upper Midwest — Ohio, Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota and the Dakotas, but would occasionally visit Missouri, Kentucky and the Mississippi River.

Naig spent 150 days annually on the water and one-third of his nights away from home. Fishing was, and still is, his passion. The tournaments were the easy part. It was the business side of being a pro that was hard. Entry fees increased from \$750 when he first began to \$1,200 to \$1,500 per event. He spent a lot of time off the water working with and for his sponsors. He was making public appearances, speaking engagements and selling their products.

After 11 years, he decided to make a career change. Now, instead of courting sponsors and promoting their products, Naig works with tournament anglers on behalf of Iowa-based Pure Fishing.

There are a lot of positives to being a professional and fishing on the circuit, he said. "Every place you would go, you would get an angler in a boat and teach him to catch more walleyes," he said. Also, when the tour would come to an area, there was an increased awareness about fishing, and the pros would promote catch-and-release. "I think that's a good thing when you selectively harvest," Naig said. "Hardly anybody keeps any fish (on the tour) and with our limited resources, I think that's good."

So where does this pro go if given the choice? "Spirit Lake," he said, mainly because it is out his back door. If he could fish any lake, it would be Lake of the Woods.

Naig, 37, and his wife Kris, live on the shore of Spirit Lake with their two children. "We all love to fish," he said. "We're living the good life."

— MK

If the arrival of warming spring temperatures turns your thoughts toward things like trout, turkeys or wild mushrooms . . . your internal compass might be pointing to northeast Iowa for an

IOWA GRANDSLAM



Morels, Trout and Turkey

Story and photos by Lowell Washburn

It's a time like no other. Just past snow melt and daytime temperatures are soaring. Soft, April showers have cleansed the landscape and the worn, tired browns of winter are giving way to the delicate hues of new foliage. From smallest to largest, every bird of every species loudly proclaims the impending change of season.

Spring has arrived!

For thousands of Iowans, the signals are unmistakable and irresistible. The compelling combination of warmth, smell and sound commands that we drop everything, proceed to the nearest exit and immediately get out-of-doors.

As the season gathers strength and advances northward, our thoughts



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naturally turn to classical spring adventures. Residing at the pinnacle of these time-honored outdoor challenges are the three all-time greats. Spring gobblers, winter-hardened trout and the always-elusive wild mushroom.

For me, there's never much debate over which direction to head. Every year it's the same. A powerful and undeniable force leads me on a straight course to the rich, limestone dairy country of extreme northeast Iowa. It is here, and here only, that outdoor aficionados can attempt to partake in the quest for, not one or two, but all three of these heady spring classics. Even more amazing is the fact that trout, turkeys and wild mushrooms may all be obtained from the same place on the same day.

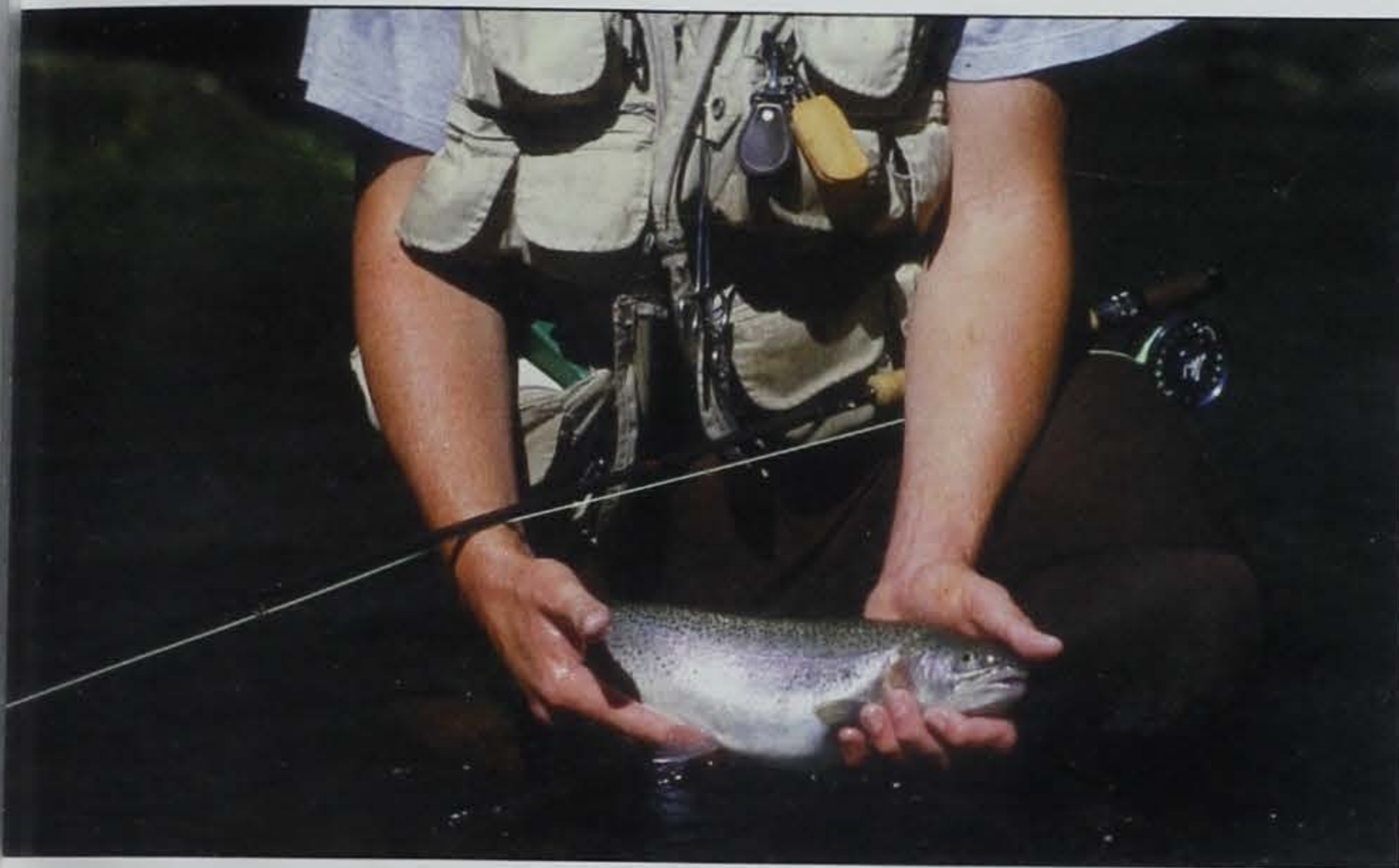
Often referred to as the Iowa Grand Slam, it is a back roads adventure without equal.

But don't get the wrong idea. The fact that northeast Iowa's bluff country literally teems with these sought-after forms of flora and fauna doesn't mean that taking the Grand Slam is easy. It isn't, and there are never guarantees.

Getting the slam for yourself will require persistence, woodsmanship and above all, good fortune. It is stuff outdoor legends are made of. Those who attain the feat have gained a never-to-be-forgotten experience.

The scenario begins with a predawn visit to the hardwood forest. The spring air is damp and you shiver as you wait. The chill is soon forgotten, however, as a purple





and crimson sunrise ignites the sky. Then, as if acting on an ancient cue, the primitive staccato rattle of gobbling turkeys begins. First one, then two and finally five toms sound off — each vying to out-compete the others. You're standing in the midst of a turkey-rich environment, and you quickly weigh the possibilities of each. You make your choice and begin the hunt.

It's one of those rare mornings

when the real-life drama unfolds just as perfectly as it does during one of those scripted-for-TV shows or turkey hunting videos. Upon leaving the tree, the closest gobbler is so enamored with your calling that he makes an immediate beeline to your position. Within scant minutes he has strutted to within yards of your tree.

By the time normal people are getting out bed, you've returned



BUSTED

It's a turkey hunter's worst nightmare. You've put in your time. You've done your homework. You know exactly who the big boys are and where they're roosting.

Opening Day finally arrives. With careful, silent steps you slip into the timber well before daylight.

Dressed in camo from head to toe, you have become part of the forest landscape. The stars eventually fade. A new dawn approaches.

Toms begin to gobble and the excitement mounts. The first bird glides to the ground, and immediately responds to your call. You see him coming and get ready.

Then, just as everything is going your way, you catch a sudden glint of movement. A second tom has cautiously tip-toed in from behind. You see him now, but it's too late. You're busted. In the space of a single heartbeat you realize that all the homework and all the planning has just gone down the drain.

This turkey will live to gobble another day.

It's a turkey hunter's worst nightmare.

— LW





to camp, made coffee and have packed your turkey with ice. Bagging and tagging a spring gobbler is always accompanied by a profound sense of relief. Standing back to admire your tom, the sigh says it all. The pressure is off.

The sun is well above the ridgetops now and you trade your heavy jacket for a camo sweatshirt. A trout stream flows 30 yards from your campsite. The gurgling sound of a narrow riffle is irresistible. You grab the flyrod and head upstream. Although the land is public, no well-defined paths mar the banks of this small, put-and-grow stream.

Within 15 minutes you are standing at your favorite pool. On the third cast, there is a distinctive swirl where a 14-inch brown inhales your offering. The fish is firm and colorful. He's the first of the season, and you carefully place him in the creel.

Farther upstream a second brown falls for the ruse. After landing the fish, you briefly admire its perfection before returning it to the stream. At the next pool, you hook one and miss one.

At 11 o'clock you stop for lunch — a streamside picnic of ham and Swiss on rye, an apple and the last three cookies from home. As you relax, a ruffed grouse vigorously drums from somewhere along the sun-drenched ridge behind you. Turning your gaze to the south-facing slope, you think, "Why not?"

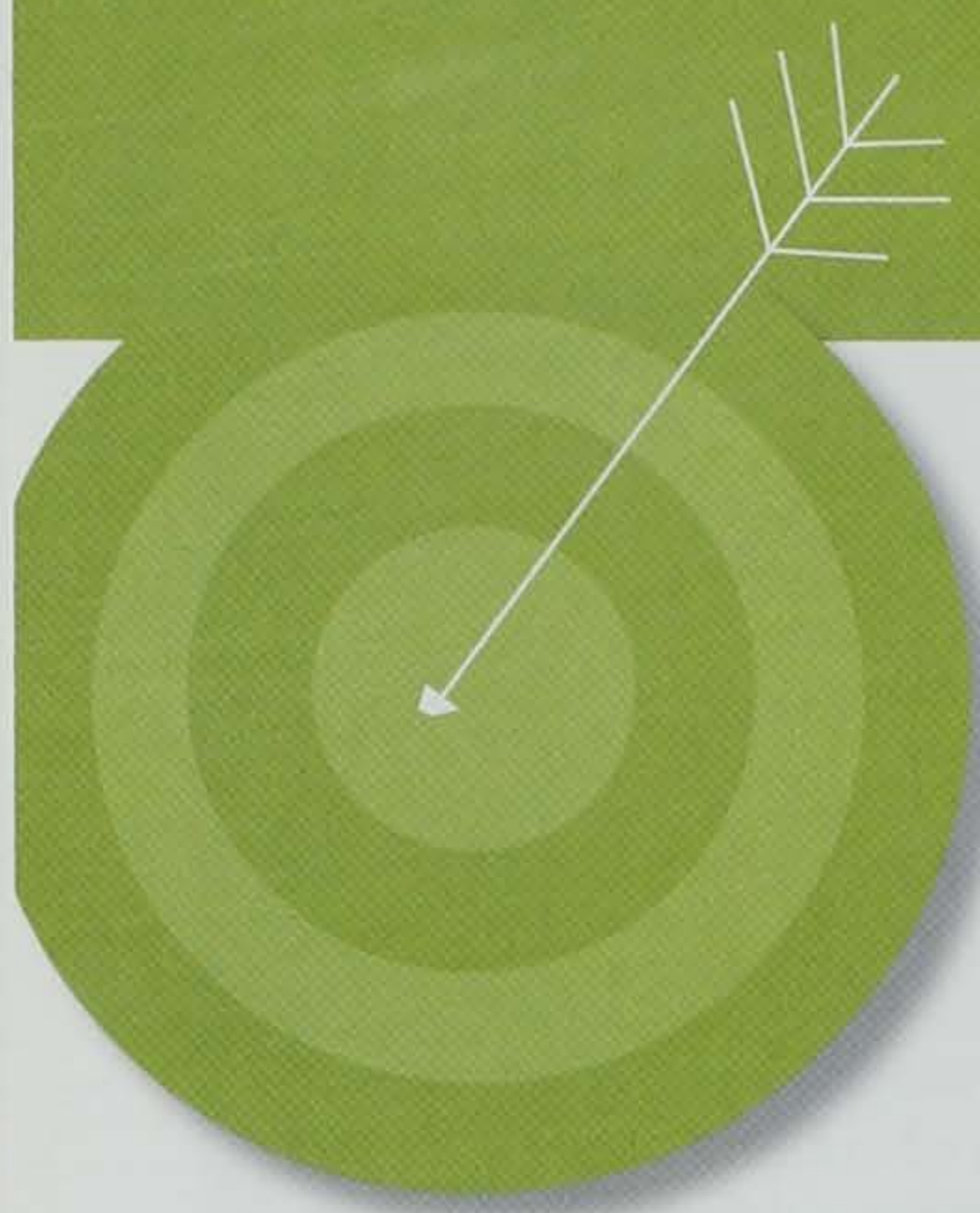
Putting the empty sandwich bag in your pants' pocket you begin your ascent. It takes awhile and you finally arrive at what you're looking for. Standing next to an abandoned logging road are a pair of dead elms. Their slipping bark is half gone. It's a text book spot, but look as you may, there is not a single wild mushroom to be found. Looking around, you quickly spot more elms farther down the ridge.

You head in that direction. Halfway to the elms it happens. You spot a trio of morels silently hiding at the edge of a bed of May apples. Tawny, slick and fresh they are specimens to admire. There's no way to determine why they chose to emerge here, but you are more than happy to collect them.

As you place the three delicacies into the bag, the thought suddenly hits you. You've just completed your first ever Iowa Grand Slam!

Hours later, you celebrate the event by having fresh trout and mushrooms for supper. After that you spend the next couple of hours staring into the campfire as the stark brilliance of a white-hot moon rises above the treeline. The trout stream and a nearby whip-poor-will set the scene to music.

You may forget a lot of things in the days ahead, but tonight you realize that 20 years from now you'll still be able to recount all the details of this spring day with absolute clarity. Above all, you know that once is never enough. Until the hour glass expires, you'll return again and again.



Archery Turkey Hunt

Pegs The Needle on the Thrill-o-Meter

Article and photos by Lowell Washburn

It was chilly and still pitch dark. There was no moon as I entered the woodland and a million white hot stars twinkled overhead.

Two hours had passed since then. It was just past sunrise and a fired up trio of gobblers was rattling the timber less than 100 yards distant. They'd been carrying on over there since the first blush of daylight. And although I hadn't actually sighted any birds, the intermittent, agitated commotion of yelping hens told me the toms were gaining the attention their egos desired.

Although I didn't really expect to lure any of those woodland monarchs from their growing harem, I continued my sporadic calling. If nothing else, I just wanted to remind the birds I was still there. As the stalemate continued, the gobbling became less frequent and then ceased altogether.

Thirty minutes later, I was

beginning to wonder if the whole flock had moved farther down the ridgetop. If so, my chances were doomed, at least for now.

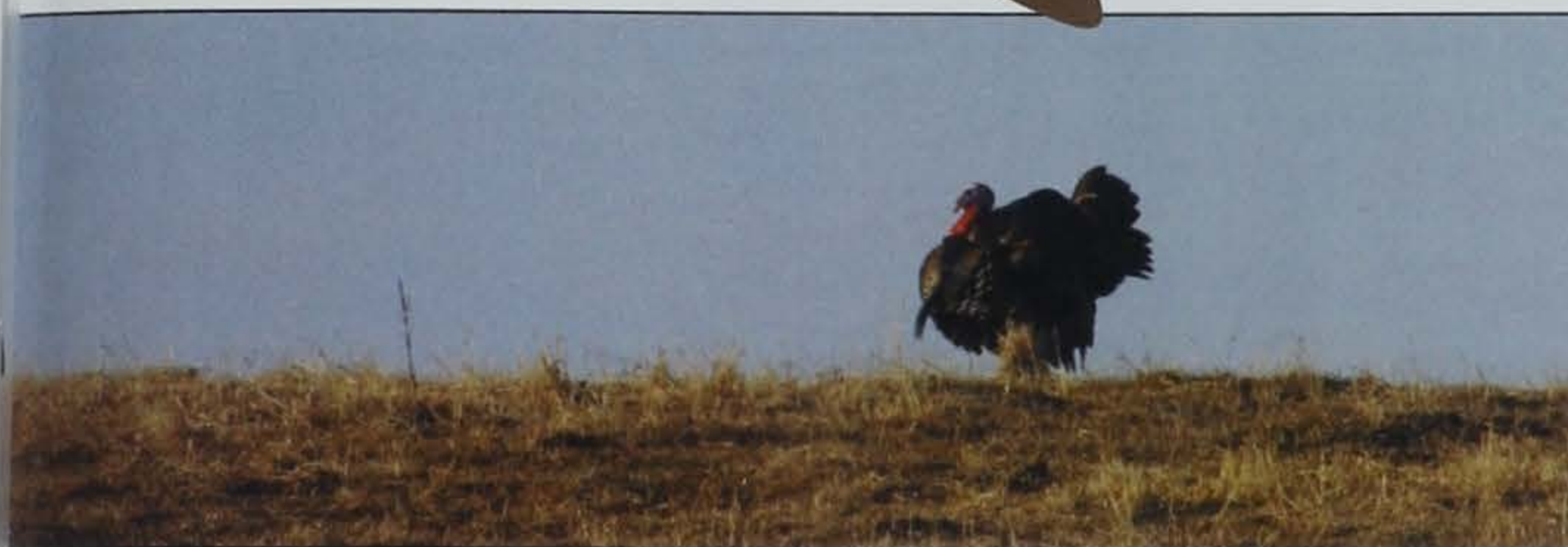
As I pondered my next course of action, a brief flash of movement caught my eye. It was a lone hen, and she was coming from the direction where the toms had last sounded off. She wasn't feeding her way through the timber the way turkeys often do, but was rather making a more or less direct path through the maze of gooseberry and oak trunks that surrounded my portable, pop-up blind. It was obvious this bird had a specific destination in mind. My guess was she was headed to make a contribution to her partially completed clutch of eggs.

The hen passed and was soon



gone from view. Ten minutes later, I glimpsed another hen. By contrast, this bird seemed in no hurry as she nonchalantly meandered her way through the timber, vigorously scratching and picking as she went. The best news was this hen had all three gobblers firmly in tow. As the birds moved more or less in my direction, I sounded a soft greeting. The hen jerked to attention, yelped back, and then began to immediately march toward my location. The three magnificent toms instantly joined

ant



Author/photographer, Lowell Washburn, proudly displays his archery-taken tom.



Youth Turkey Hunter Is Hooked On Archery

It's not all that uncommon for archery enthusiasts to spend years attempting to bag their first wild turkey with a bow. Fifteen-year-old Taylor Burgin of Garnavillo accomplished the feat in — oh — about 30 minutes. The hunt took place last spring in the picturesque bluff country of northeast Iowa's Clayton County.

"I'd been scouting this field, and had seen birds there most every night," says Burgin.

"It was an afternoon hunt. School let out early that day and my Grandpa, Paul Puelz, dropped me off at the field. One turkey was already out in the open and I waited until he went back into the timber. I hurried in, set up my blind and put out the decoys."

After entering the blind, Burgin went to work on the call. A half hour later he spotted a lone tom on an adjacent hilltop. The turkey started coming, and the strutting bird had soon approached to within bow range.

"While I was watching him, I suddenly heard a second gobbler spit and drum," said Burgin. "That

turkey had sneaked in from behind. He had a hen with him, and he was close. He charged my decoys and was ready to pounce on the jake decoy when I shot. He was 10 yards away, and it was probably only five seconds from when I saw him until he was in the decoys."

Burgin bagged his bird with a Golden Eagle compound bow. His arrow was tipped with a Spitfire Gobbler Getter broadhead. The tom weighed 23 pounds, had 1 1/4-inch spurs, and a 10-inch beard that was "nice and thick."

"I was just pumped," recalls Burgin. "That turkey was my very first archery kill. (Last fall,

he added deer to the venue and successfully bagged a mature doe.) After I shot, I just started shaking so bad. It all happened so fast that I didn't have time to get excited until it was over."

"When my Grandpa came to pick me up, I just held up the bird when he got there. I guess we were both pretty excited."

Prior to last spring, Burgin used a shotgun to bag two jakes and one gobbler in three seasons. This year he plans to use his bow exclusively.

"I like shotguns, but you just can't beat the thrill of bow hunting," he concluded.

—LW



the parade. The gobblers remained silent but had soon advanced to where I could clearly hear the harsh scrape of their dragging wing tips.

A nearby crow sounded off. The unexpected noise was all it took to trigger an immediate gobbling frenzy. If I didn't have high blood pressure when I got here, I sure had it now.

A few seconds more and the hen was literally standing among the decoys. The strutting gobblers had closed to around 10 paces.

For the majority of Iowa turkey enthusiasts, this hunt would have been over. With any load in any type of shotgun, it would have simply been a matter of choosing the longest beard and pulling the trigger.

But I didn't have a shotgun. Instead, my quivering hands held a bow and this hunt was far from over. In spite of the fact that three, puffed up, fully mature longbeards were standing just a few paces away, the spindly branches of two gooseberry bushes had eliminated all chances of taking the shot. For me, the toms might as well have been on the dark side of the moon.

But there was still hope. Each time one or more of the toms would drum, the effort would bring the birds a step or two closer to the decoys, which was also a step or two closer to clearing the foliage.

The first tom finally stepped into the clear as I silently brought the bow to full draw. By now, I was plenty nerved-up, but the shot looked good. Placing the pin on the gobbler's center mass, I released the string.

Although I couldn't hear the



arrow's impact, the tom appeared to explode in a burst of feathers. All illusion of success quickly dissolved, however, as the feathers settled to the ground. To my dismay, the turkey was still on his feet — alive and well.

The strutting, of course, was over. All three toms were now erect, tight-feathered and nervous. The scene was rapidly deteriorating. The previous sounds of drumming had been replaced by anxious alarm putts. With jerky, quickening steps, the trio was beginning to make its departure. The hen had already sprinted from view.

By now, I had nocked another arrow and regained full draw. I must have been shaking pretty bad because my arrow fell off its rest and had to be reset. The birds had retreated a full 20 yards or so before the original tom halted long enough to provide a brief opportunity for a second shot. I quickly brought the pin on target and loosed the arrow.

This time, there was an audible crack as the broadhead found its mark. The tom lunged forward, thrashed its wings twice and fell over. The gobbler was in the bag.

But the show wasn't over. As the bird went down, the surviving toms turned and came running back to investigate. Sensing a distinct opportunity for dominance, one of the gobblers delivered an authoritative foot stomp to its fallen comrade. The third tom responded by attacking the attacker. The birds sparred a time or two, called a truce and then trotted off in the direction of the departed hen.

The fallen tom turned out to be a fully mature, 24-pounder with long, needle-sharp spurs. My first shot had been high, neatly clipping a handful of feathers from atop the strutting gobbler's back. The arrow never even broke the skin.

Although I've hunted Iowa turkeys for more than a quarter-century, I didn't start pursuing them with bow and arrow until recent years. The reasons for attempting the hunt were two-fold.

The first was that I enjoy all aspects of archery and have bow-hunted Iowa deer since the mid-1970s. I surmised that since archery deer hunting was so much fun, bow hunting spring gobblers would provide an equally good time. The second assumption was that, since I already considered the wild turkey to be the ultimate test of outdoor skill, taking one with a bow would provide the premier woodland challenge.

It became immediately apparent that both assumptions were correct. Bow hunting turkeys was indeed fun. It also provided the ultimate challenge — and then some.

I must also admit, I had some initial misconceptions.

RANGE

So far, the majority of the wild turkeys I'd taken had been brought to bag with a traditional, chokeless side-by-side, muzzleloading shotgun. The optimum range for these smoothbores is around 15 yards.

Since I'm very comfortable shooting a compound bow up to 30 yards, I assumed switching to archery tackle would actually double my

effective range. The assumption was fine in theory, but not in practice.

Archery turkey hunting takes place at ground level and not from the tree stand. Therefore, the visual perspective of the entire landscape changes. As turkeys approach your archery setup, lower story clutter becomes a major consideration.

That handful of twigs or foliage that wouldn't even be noticed by a shotgun hunter, suddenly makes a shot at your 10-yard strutter out of the question.

BLINDS AND DECOYS

When it comes to hunting wild turkeys, I don't like portable blinds and I don't like decoys. I do, in fact, hate them. When hunting wild turkeys with a bow, however, I use both. Although I've heard of blindless archers drawing on and killing turkeys, the endeavor is simply beyond my capabilities.

Today's portable pop-ups offer bow hunters an ever-growing array of styles and prices. Aside from location, the most important aspect of using any ground blind is to eliminate noise and light. After setting up on a gobbling tom, it is always wise to clear all leaves, sticks or other debris from the center of the blind. Banking up the floor perimeter with this litter not only makes the hide darker, but also eliminates sound. It is not unusual for turkeys to approach within three or four paces of a ground blind. Any sounds coming from within the structure's interior will be regarded as threatening.

Although calling alone may bring toms into range, the

judicious use of decoys will help put a bird exactly where you want him. When hunting from a blind, I use a minimum of three or four decoys. I think flocks, even small ones, provide greater drawing power. Decoys that move are more convincing than those that don't.

TIME OF DAY

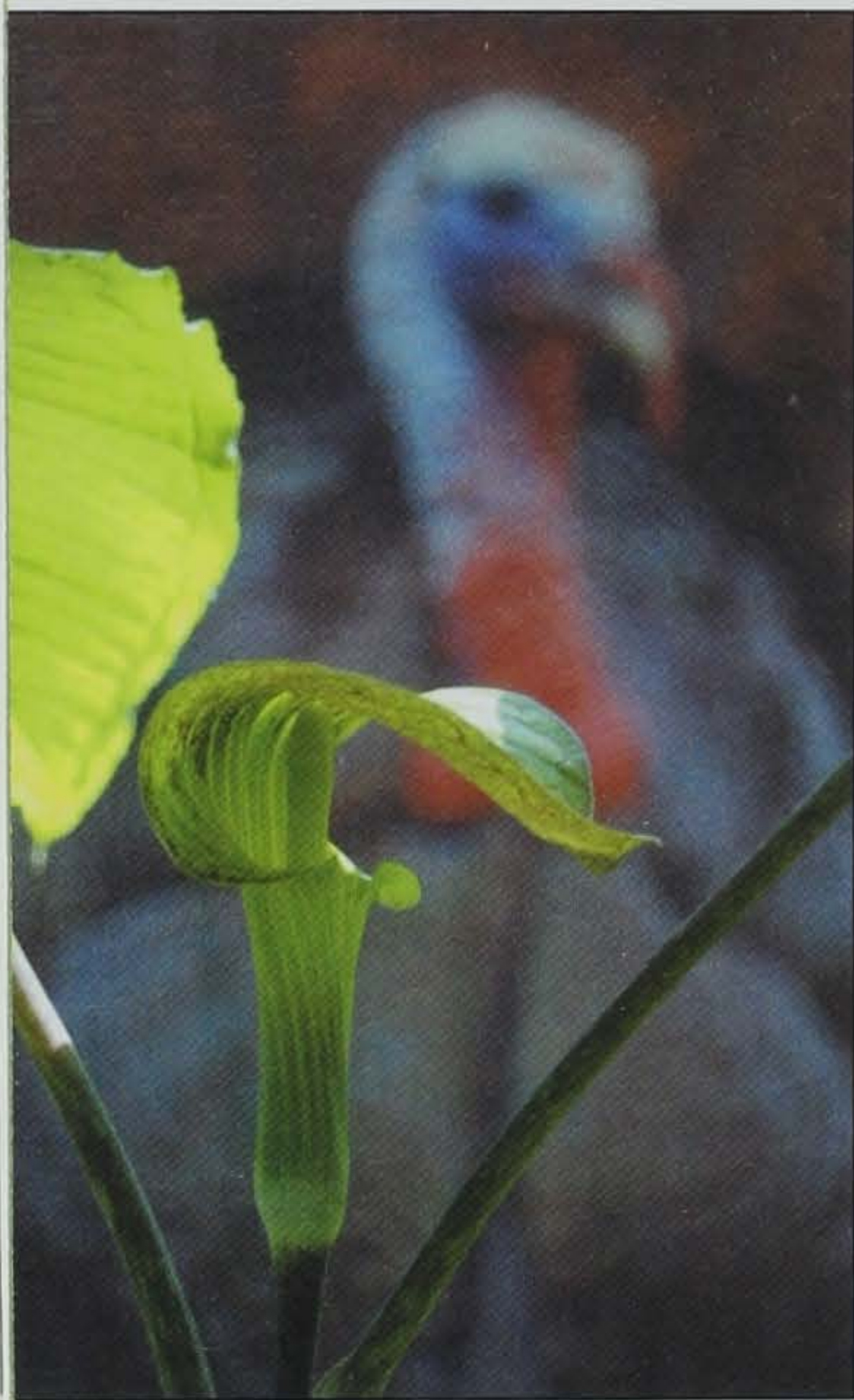
When setting up on daybreak gobblers, don't be surprised if you have birds strutting in front of your set when, though legal shooting time has arrived, it's still too dark to sight a bow. I've had this happen several times, and it's one more frustration that shotgun hunters don't contend with.

One of the most productive times to bow hunt for turkeys occurs during mid- to late morning after hens have left the toms. Ideal locations include field or pasture edges. Toms routinely cruise these areas in search of hens. Decoys are highly visible in these situations, and any birds that approach these openings are sure to see your set.

BROADHEADS

Once in range, turkeys can be effectively taken with either traditional, fixed-blade broadheads or with mechanical broadheads. Both tips can be fired through the net screens that cover the shooting ports of most blinds.

Although I love the sport, I'm far from what you'd call an archery purist. I still hunt turkeys with a muzzleloader and also enjoy conventional shotguns. But bow hunting continues to become an increasingly important part of my



spring season. During fall and winter turkey hunts, I use a bow exclusively.

Regardless of the circumstance, my turkey hunts are never more exciting than when I'm carrying a bow. Because of range restrictions and a host of other handicaps, bow

hunting provides the turkey hunter with unique opportunities for prolonged, close-range observation of turkey behavior.

Attempting to bag an eastern wild turkey with bow and arrow is simply the most challenging, rewarding, exhilarating and

frustrating hunt you'll ever attempt. If you enjoy archery deer hunting but haven't yet drawn your bow on a spring gobbler, perhaps this is the year to give it a try. I guarantee that it will peg the needle on your turkey hunting thrill-o-meter.

Lifelong Archery Enthusiast Recalls Historic Iowa Turkey Hunt



Grant Poindexter of Indianola carries the unique distinction of being the first Iowan to harvest a modern-day wild turkey with a bow and arrow. The legendary hunt took place in the spring of 1974, the very first year wild turkeys became legal game in Iowa. The location was the Whitebreast Unit of southern Iowa's Stephen's State Forest.

"I remember that it rained the night before, but turkeys started gobbling the next morning while it was still dark," recalls Poindexter.

"I don't think any of us really knew what we were doing back then. I had a push button caller and tried using that on a bird. The tom flew down and I started stalking it. I ended up spooking that turkey."

"Nothing happened for an

hour or so, and then I heard two more gobblers start up. I started sneaking in on them. The first thing I saw was a tom's white head. I thought, what in the world is that? That's how it was then. We didn't even know that a turkey's head changed colors.

Anyway, I soon realized that it was a turkey. I got ready and the tom strutted through at 30 yards. I took the shot and made a good hit. It was my first turkey and the first 'modern day' turkey taken by archery in Iowa."

The gobbler was bagged with a 65-pound recurve bow using a wooden arrow tipped with a Bear Razorhead. After field dressing his trophy, Poindexter headed for the Conservation Commission check

station. The tom weighed in at an even 23 pounds. The largest gobbler taken in the state that year was a 25-pounder.

"The officer at the check station later told me that if I hadn't stopped to field dress that bird before coming in that it would have tied or beat that record," Poindexter chuckled.

Poindexter has shot an additional four turkeys since that eventful 1974 spring hunt. All have been taken from the ground — all without the aid of blinds. During the off-season, Poindexter spends time producing handmade longbows which he gives to friends. He also produces around 20 kids' longbows per year which make their way into the hands of young hunters through free event raffles.

Although Poindexter still retains his passion for shooting, he may have to sit out this spring's turkey hunt as he recuperates from his third knee replacement surgery. So far, the recovery is going well. This September, the 63-year-old archer plans to bow hunt for elk in New Mexico.

—LW



Ty Smedes

Setting A Course For Action

by Kevin Baskins

Iowa's Wildlife Action Plan sets a 25-year course for creating, improving and preserving habitats necessary for healthy wildlife populations.



Ty Smedes

The message was simple, straight-to-the-point and ultimately effective: "It's the economy, stupid."

Political consultant James Carville used that minimalistic message in 1992 to keep a then, relatively obscure candidate by the name of Bill Clinton focused on the big picture in a successful presidential campaign.

Substitute the word "economy" with "habitat" and Iowa's recently completed Wildlife Action Plan would be summarized as succinctly as Clinton's 1992 campaign mantra.

Securing a Future for Fish and Wildlife: a Conservation Legacy for Iowans is the first attempt ever to evaluate the status of Iowa's wildlife species and their habitats. It examines stresses on wild creatures, as well as their habitats, and lays out visions and strategies to conserve wildlife over the next 25 years.

The plan, representing more than 100 people and two years of effort, identifies 999 species of birds, mammals, fish, reptiles, amphibians, mussels (freshwater clams), land snail butterflies, dragonflies and damselflies, of which one-third are a concern due to population declines. The recent plan is the first comprehensive effort to inventory Iowa's wildlife and the natural resources needed to sustain them since a similar project was undertaken in 1933. The 1933 plan cast a chilling assessment of the effects the first century of European settlement was having on Iowa's natural resources and wildlife community (see story on page 45).

It has been said that Iowa's landscape has been altered more by humanity than any other state and

ultimately, as the plan recognizes, the perpetuation of those species comes down to having adequate habitat available to thrive. Only 4 percent of the original wetlands and one-tenth of 1 percent of the native grasses are left. Surface waters have been degraded by excessive siltation, nutrients and exotic species.

"We're better equipped now to know where we need to go because we have a historical perspective dating back to the time we were shooting the last buffalo," said Ken Herring, division administrator for the Conservation and Recreation Division of the DNR.

"In the past, we've not fully understood the entire ecosystem and how different plant and animal species are all interconnected. Even today, we are still unlocking secrets on individual species such as which plants are needed for specific butterflies," Herring said.

As the process of developing a statewide wildlife plan unfolded, it did not take long for those involved to arrive at the conclusion of habitat development and preservation being the key.

"As we started looking at the research and species we have that are of concern, it became evident that the overriding problem was a lack of habitat," said Terry Little, wildlife research supervisor for the DNR.

Only about 2.8 percent of Iowa's land is in state or federal ownership, according to statistics from the National Wilderness Institute, ranking it 47th among the 50 states.

Improving habitat in a state with high private land ownership becomes problematic, but is something the plan takes into account. A key statement in the plan acknowledges that Iowa will

"remain one of the world's great agricultural regions..." and seeks solutions within that context, said Doug Harr, wildlife diversity coordinator for the DNR.

Harr said the goal of doubling the amount of protected wildlife habitat in the next 25 years does not rely solely on public land acquisition.

"A big part of this plan is the inclusion of



Iowa's Wildlife Action Plan

What is it: The Iowa Wildlife Action Plan is designed to improve wildlife habitat in Iowa over the next 25 years.

Why habitat: Habitat includes essential food, water, shelter and space in a suitable arrangement for wildlife to survive. Much of Iowa's wildlife habitat is gone or severely degraded and this has the largest impact on what species can survive here.

Why is it important: The plan sets up a process to inventory and monitor wildlife species in Iowa as well as create strategies to improve wildlife habitat in the state. The plan is also required to receive federal money through the State Wildlife Grants (SWG) program. The Iowa DNR has been allocated more than \$3 million from the SWG program since 2001, with funds used to enhance its Wildlife Diversity Program through increased research, habitat protection and management for "species of greatest conservation need." Iowa must match the SWG income dollar-for-dollar with non-federal funds.

Key components: 1. Inventorying and monitoring of 999 species of birds, mammals, fish, reptiles, amphibians, mussels (freshwater clams), land snails, butterflies, dragonflies and damselflies.
2. Habitat creation and improvement with an overall goal of doubling wildlife habitat in Iowa on both public and private lands.
3. Addressing the existing stresses on native wildlife caused by invasive species.

The plan on-line: This summer, the entire plan will be available at http://www.iowadnr.com/wildlife/files/IAcomprehensive_plan.html. Also this summer, a synopsis of the plan will be published for the general public.

protecting habitat with private landowners through the use of conservation easements and other similar agreements," said Harr.

A watershed approach is incorporated into the plan, which also includes aquatic species such as fish, mussels, amphibians, reptiles and aquatic insects.

"Habitat and land use are key components to water quality. This plan includes watershed protection and takes into account everything that Iowans use water for," Harr said.

The plan is intended to encompass a broad spectrum of people in the state.

"This really is a plan for all of us here in Iowa, not just the DNR. It's intended so everyone who has ever partnered or wanted to partner with wildlife can do so," said Harr.

Ninety-two individuals, representing 59 organizations, businesses and agencies, actively assisted with plan development and review. Additional comments were received prior to completion of a final draft. Some comments made by reviewers can be found on the following pages.

Plan Review

Jessica Skibbe, ISU graduate student, North Liberty

Skibbe's primary interest is butterflies, but she describes herself more as an ecologist that works with insects rather than an

entomologist, and thus believes that the plan does put the proper emphasis on improving habitat.

Skibbe said while her opinions were heard, she isn't sure they were taken very seriously.



The plan is also designed to be a "living document" that is continually evolving and changing as it progresses, said Harr.

Both Harr and Little say the plan lays out realistic goals for Iowa on everything from increasing habitat and decreasing invasive species to encouraging more Iowans to recreate in the outdoors. It also takes into consideration modern social acceptances to wildlife.

"I think we all realize that some native species such as elk and bison, mountain lions and bears are no longer compatible to today's society in Iowa. The ground beneath us would have to change a great deal before we would see those species returning to our wild landscape and being accepted," said Little.

"I think others looked at me as a student, so I don't know how seriously they took my input," she said.

"The plan comes up with more or less concrete goals and objectives, which I think is important. I think it was important that the plan set far-reaching goals. I was impressed that, as a whole, the group that worked on the plan is optimistic about the future," she said.

"Thirty years from now, I want to be able to say to my children, 'Look at what we've accomplished,' and be able to point to this plan," she said.

Plan Review

Rick Robinson, Iowa Farm Bureau

"Iowa farmers are very proud of the progress that's been made in Iowa the last 20 years in terms of providing habitat to



game and nongame species.

Voluntary federal farm programs have had a lot to do with this progress.

State voluntary efforts, such as soil and water conservation cost-share programs that protect water quality, have also been positive for fish and game. Clearly, Iowa farmers want to do more. There's more demand for these voluntary program dollars today by farmers than there are funds available to do the work. In the meantime, they'll continue to do these things with their own resources.

"The draft Iowa Wildlife Action Plan is under review by Farm Bureau. It appears to recognize the need to balance viable wildlife populations and habitat with human social tolerance. While this draft plan is a step in the right direction, more detail will be needed to determine how this can effectively be done in a voluntary fashion that allows Iowans to protect their families and property from predators without permission of conservation officers. We welcome the dialogue."

From Sanctuaries to Sustainability

Some of the conclusions made by the Iowa Conservation Plan of 1933 were as bleak as the drought-stricken, dustbowl conditions of the time. In fact, the preparers of that report threw in the towel on a few species.

"The game survey has determined that the following native wild animals and birds will not again be sufficiently abundant to permit hunting them: deer, wild turkey, sharptail grouse, ruffed grouse and prairie chicken," according to the 1933 plan.

The plan went on to propose that sanctuaries be established in Iowa to preserve a few of those animals within the state.

"When you think back to when that 1933 report was done, conditions were about as bad as they could get. The people who worked on that plan were looking at the bottom of the barrel in terms of conservation," said Terry Little, supervisor of wildlife research for the DNR.

The 1933 report reflects an era when Iowa's natural resources had been almost entirely converted to agricultural use, still mostly dependant on horses.

Little said the conservation pratfalls of a horse-dominated agriculture were driven home to him during an early research project involving pheasant populations in

Plan Review

Kathleen Ziemer, Butterflies of Iowa, Norwalk

Ziemer, who said her biggest environmental concern is water quality, said the wildlife plan is a good start.



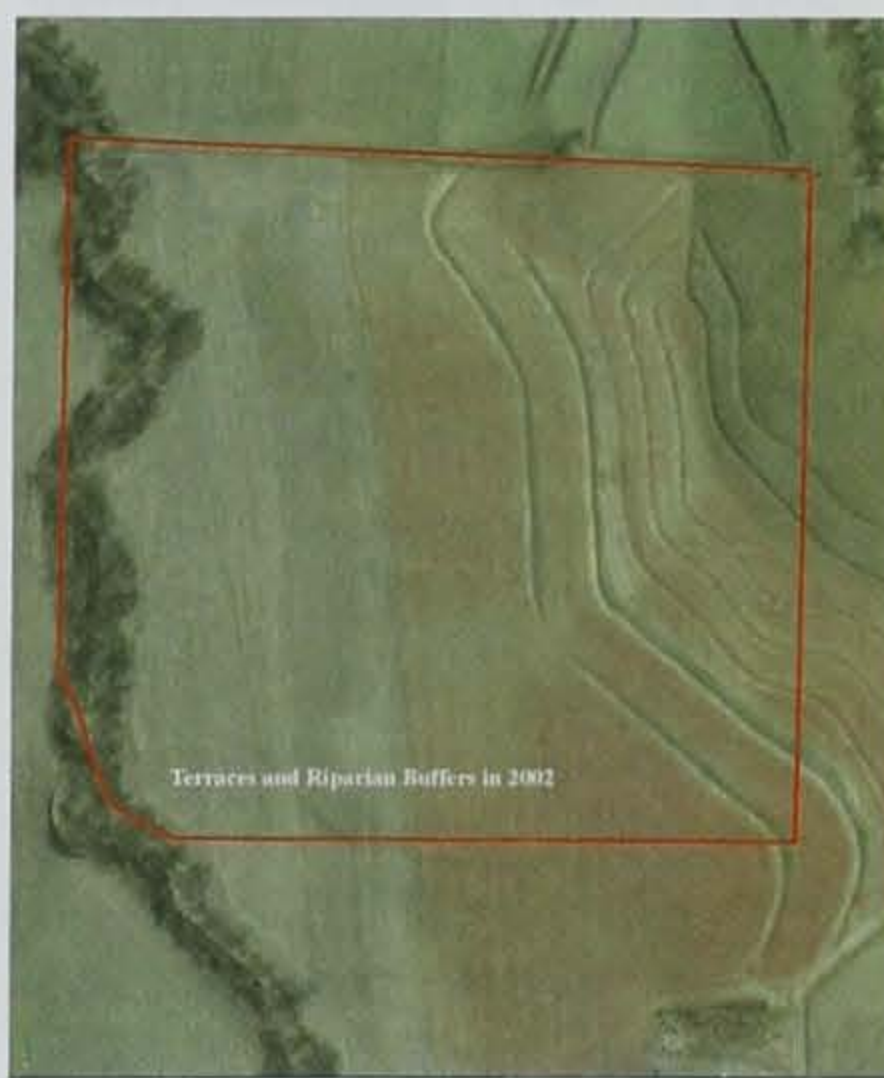
"I don't know that a lot of people understand what this plan is and why it is important," she said.

Ziemer said she is happy that the plan recognizes there is more to wildlife than just game and that the nongame species need to be recognized as well.

"My main concern is butterfly habitat and what we do that saves or restores it. A lot of what I do is for the benefit of butterflies, insects and other small animals. We need to recognize that anything we do to the ground has a bigger effect on the environment around us. Everyone wants a beautiful lawn and that's wonderful, but it has an impact. Anything the state can do to make people more aware of the environment is a plus," said Ziemer.

And Ziemer said butterflies are an important environmental indicator for many people.

"Butterflies are the prima donna of the insect world. When their numbers go down, people will notice," she said.



Private lands play a key role in providing the habitat necessary to perpetuate Iowa's wildlife species. The 1938 (left) and 2002 photos illustrate the potential proper land-use has on creating wildlife habitat on private lands. The 1938 photo shows severe erosion with no protection to the creek. As contrast, the 2002 photo of the same area shows field terraces and a riparian (wooded) buffer strip along the creek.

Amish country. The prevailing theory that pheasants would thrive there, in a less-intense, less-mechanized agricultural society did not hold true.

"What we found is that there were actually less pheasants because the horses grazed most of the cover down to nothing. I would imagine that similar conditions existed when the 1933 plan was done," Little said.

Roll the clock forward some 70 years and the most recently completed Iowa Wildlife Action Plan takes a more optimistic view of improving wildlife and conservation in Iowa.

Since that time, Iowa has taken dramatic turns in species such as deer, wild turkey, river otters, Canada geese, trumpeter swans and birds of prey such as peregrine falcons and bald eagles. In fact, some of the progress has been so dramatic that where the 1933 plan proposed zoo-like sanctuaries to preserve some species like deer and wild turkey, the current wildlife plan includes caveats such as "socially acceptable wildlife environments within a landscape dominated by agriculture."

In addition to some of the conservation programs that later followed to improve wildlife habitat, Little said the authors of the 1933 plan likely foresaw professional biologists being employed by the state to improve wildlife.

Many of the biologists instrumental with restoration of these species are still with the DNR and remember some of the tribulations of getting the animals reestablished. They've also been surprised by the success and having to adjust to it as

Waterfowl biologist Guy Zenner bands a Canada goose in the early days of Iowa's goose restoration program.

the species have gone from being "a thrill just to catch a glimpse of" to daily complaints of there being too many.

Little, who was heavily involved with the reestablishment of wild turkeys, remembers the wildly optimistic projections that someday, turkey hunting opportunities could be provided to as many as 3,000 people with a harvest of 1,500. Last year alone, nearly 60,000 hunters

harvested approximately 25,000 birds.

"The early thinking was that we needed at least 40,000 acres of contiguous forest for turkeys to survive," Little said.

But an early experiment in a much smaller forest stand near Northwood proved the birds could thrive in a much smaller forested habitat.

"After Northwood, the argument became if they could survive there,

Plan Review

James Dinsmore, professor emeritus at Iowa State University and author of *A Country So Full Of Game*

Dinsmore said the plan did a good job of bringing together the experts

necessary to do a comprehensive inventory of the wildlife species in Iowa.

"I think the plan rightfully moves beyond the individual wildlife species and focuses on habitats and the various habitat needs of wildlife in Iowa," said Dinsmore.

The potential weaknesses of the plan may fall outside the scope of biologists responsible for creation and implementation of it, said Dinsmore.

"Given the long-term decline we have seen in hunting and fishing participation, I have questions about how realistic the goal is of increasing outdoor recreation participation over the next 25 years.



Even if it is accomplished, a lot of it would come from non-consumptive participation who, historically, have not been as willing to empty their wallets as readily as a sportsman does who thinks nothing of dropping a hundred dollars at a Ducks Unlimited banquet," Dinsmore said.

Dinsmore said the ultimate success of the plan will also require political support to provide the funding needed to meet the goals.

"I remain to be convinced that it will happen," said Dinsmore of getting the political support.

But overall, Dinsmore said the plan is successful in taking stock of the wildlife currently existing in Iowa and developing a list of the critical habitats needing to be developed and preserved.

"I like the fact that in this plan, that a broader, holistic approach was taken where non-hunted species came to the forefront. This plan puts as much emphasis on minnows as it does walleyes and on sparrows as it does turkeys," Dinsmore said.



they could survive pretty much anywhere and that's when we started looking at all the river valleys," Little said.

Ron Andrews started out as a pessimist when river otters were first reintroduced. Associating the acrobatic animals with "Rocky Mountain-clear water, teeming with trout," the choice to first put them in the muddy waters above Red Rock Reservoir made the biologist doubtful.

Since that time in the late 1980s, otters have spread to every county in the state, even to the point of generating an

occasional complaint from landowners about cleaning out ponds of fish.

Likewise, the early perception on trumpeter swans was that the species needed large, expansive wetland complexes to thrive, casting a dash of pessimism to the early restoration efforts, said Andrews.

"We now have trumpeters on very small, duckweed-choked city lagoons. Thank goodness these birds have figured out a way to make our efforts successful," said Andrews.

The early goal on Canada geese was to establish a relatively small breeding population in the northern part of the state, according to DNR waterfowl biologist Guy Zenner.

What biologists like Zenner learned from Canada geese is that some species are highly adaptable to

changing habitats as witnessed by the number of complaints received each year in urban areas about overabundant geese.

"We never thought the geese would be that adaptable and we never thought we'd see as much reproduction in this state as we have," said Zenner.

For Zenner, this success has changed his role from having geese trucked all over the state to reestablished populations, to having them trucked out of areas where they are perceived to be a problem.

—KB

Plan Review

Ric Zarwell, Audubon Society

Zarwell said the process was important to ensure continued federal funding for nongame species in Iowa.



"It was a good process in that it brought in a good cross-section of nongame wildlife groups. I'm hoping it is seen that way in Washington D.C. as well," he said.

Zarwell said the emphasis the plan puts on increasing habitat in the state is the correct one.

"We are seeing a widespread, rapid decline in the variety of birds we have here and it all comes down to habitat," Zarwell said.

Plan Review

Dave DeGues, Iowa Nature Conservancy

"The plan does an excellent job of summarizing what animals are out there and which are in need of

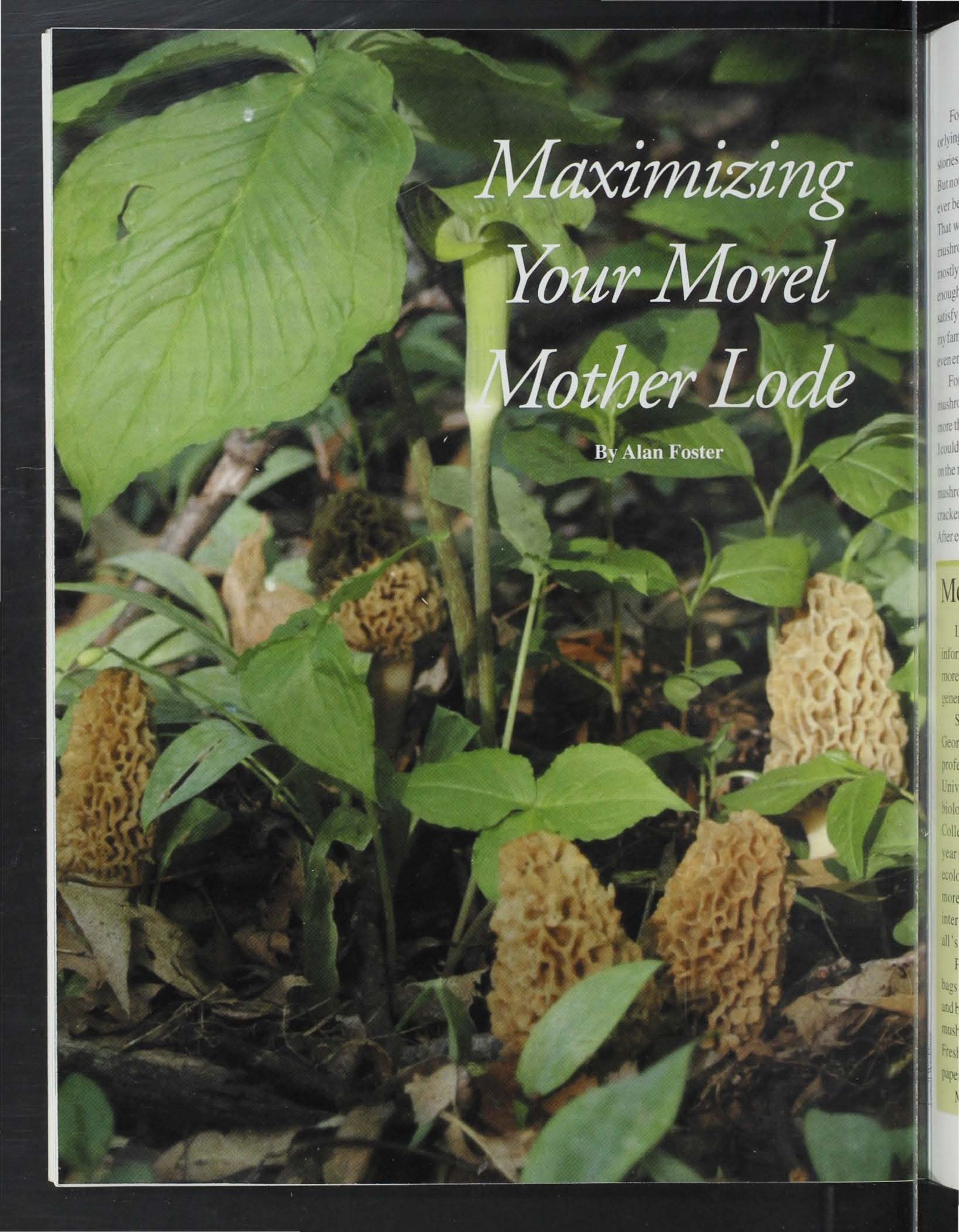


assistance. It involved a wide array of groups. It's the first time all of the wildlife species have been discussed like this," DeGues said.

DeGues said he understands it is a wildlife plan, but would have still liked to have seen plant communities addressed.

The plan also has lofty goals, he said.

"I think it's better to shoot high than it is to shoot low. This plan is going to take a lot of follow up," DeGues said.



Maximizing Your Morel Mother Lode

By Alan Foster

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For years I had heard lucky — or lying — mushroom hunters tell stories of finding the “mother lode.” But not until the spring of 2003 did I ever believe any of them were true. That was the year even I — an avid mushroom hunter but until then a mostly unsuccessful one — found enough mushrooms to not only satisfy my fungi fancy but those of my family, friends, neighbors and even enemies.

For the first time in my mushroom hunting career, I had more than I could eat and more than I could give away. For days I lived on the morel recipe staple — mushrooms dipped in egg wash and cracker crumbs and fried in butter. After eating my way through several

pounds of mushrooms and an equal amount of butter, I was ready for something else. Pizzas, omelettes and pasta were all dressed up with the delicate fungi and I even experimented with the more extravagant, like morels stuffed with spinach, pine nuts and other ingredients I can’t even pronounce. Yet near the end of the season, my refrigerator fruit and vegetables drawers were still brimming with mushrooms. Not a bad problem to have, but given their relatively short-shelf life, I had to do something.

Long-term storage of morel mushrooms had never been an issue for me, but in this one



Lowell Washburn

If Lady Luck smiles, and you find yourself with more morels than you can eat, there are ways to preserve your bounty well past the season.

More On Morels

Lois Tiffany is a wealth of information when it comes to morels and mushroom hunting in general.

She should be. Tiffany and George Knaphus, botany professors at Iowa State University, and Don Huffman, a biology professor at Central College in Pella, conducted a 10-year study (1984-1993) on the ecology and distribution of morels in Iowa. In a recent interview, she offered a few tips all ‘shroomers should heed.

Pack out your prize in mesh bags to hasten the removal of dirt and bugs and prevent the mushroom from drawing moisture. Fresh morels should be stored in a paper sack; avoid all plastics.

Make sure each specimen you



Lowell Washburn

eat is identified. Don’t eat too many at one time. Remove any brown or dried spots, making sure to give it a good margin of cut around the spot. When in doubt, throw it out.

When picking, pinch or cut the mushroom off at the base. While some claim doing so leaves “seed” for later, the real reason is it keeps excess dirt from tainting your find.

Morels should be eaten or preserved within three to four days

after picking. Young, smaller morels have a longer shelf-life than older, larger ones.

As for secrets to finding them, well, her advice is a little less direct. Although she admits there is some relationship between morels and dead elm trees, it’s a misleading one at best.

“I never argue with anyone who says they have a good site. If it works for them, that’s great.”

magical season, I was faced with that or the unthinkable—throwing them away. Given my inability to let such a precious resource go to waste, I was afforded the luxury of trying different preservation methods.

There are several ways to preserve morels, but by far the most popular are drying, freezing and canning. All have their pros and cons, and all have their different uses. Preserved morels will never rival fresh-picked, but if done right, you will be able to enjoy your bounty as long as your stash holds out.

DRYING

Drying, I found, is the best method because it is quick, easy and the least time-consuming. It's also

the most versatile. Properly dried and stored morels will last for years. They can be rehydrated and used just like a fresh morel, although the texture and flavor won't quite stand up to fresh.

Dried morels, crushed into a dust, also serve well as a seasoning or soup stock base.

Commercial food dehydrators work well, but make sure you get a

Clay Smith

Although plastic containers aren't advised for storing fresh morels, airtight containers are preferred for storing frozen morels.



good one. Dehydrators that do not circulate air top to bottom or do not have heat settings sometimes leave the specimens on the bottom racks dark and brittle, while those on the

The Ditty On Dehydrating

While anyone who has dried morels before will have their own take and tips on the process, there are a few general guidelines most will agree on.

Mushrooms earmarked for drying should not be washed. If dried outside, they shouldn't be left out overnight because of dew, or when there is a threat of rain.

If using a commercial dehydrator, dry in the garage or basement. The drying process can produce matter that can cause eye and nose irritation, migraines and other maladies.

Some dehydrators don't dry evenly, so rotate trays and rearrange mushrooms to get the best results.

Morels can be dried whole, but if commercial dehydrator tray spacing doesn't allow that, the mushrooms may have to be split lengthwise and dried.

Earlier gray or yellow morels dry best due to their smaller size.

Store dried morels in an airtight container.

Dried morels should be crisp, but not "burned." If you notice the stems turning a dark color, the settings are too hot.

Dried morels should be rehydrated in water or white wine for at least a couple hours. But don't throw the liquid "stock" away; it's great as a base for soups, stews or gravies.



Clay Smith

Drying is one of the best way to preserve excess morels, offering the easiest and most versatile way to enjoy spring's offering well past the season.

top racks are under-dried.

Air-drying is also an option, but is dependant on weather. Air-drying requires eight to 10 hours of dry, sunny conditions, preferably with a little breeze. To air-dry, place whole morels on nonmetallic screens and place in the sun early in the morning. Morels can also be dried by stringing them whole with needle and thread and hanging them in a dry, airy location.

FREEZING

Freezing is another method that can produce palatable results well into summer, if you are lucky enough to have that many. Some people freeze morels raw, but I have seen the end-result and it is not my preferred choice. If you decide to freeze, it's best to cook them first.

Some prefer to partially cook mushrooms in butter, "sweat" them as the culinary geniuses say, before freezing. That works well if you plan to use them in soups, omelettes or as a compliment to steak, chicken or chops. A few minutes in a pan is all it takes to finish them off.

I prefer to lightly coat them with flour, or egg and cracker crumbs, brown them and freeze. Again, they are not as good as fresh, but they work in a pinch when a little taste of spring is needed. Freeze the mushrooms individually on a cookie sheet before bagging so you don't end up with a sticky, lumpy mess.

CANNING

Admittedly, I can't comment on the quality of canned morels because, well, I never canned them. But I know people who have, and

they extol the virtues of the end product. According to a submittal from "Courtesy of Cindy" on "The Great Morel Site," a website dedicated to all things morel, the process involves sterilizing a wide mouth pint jar and adding a teaspoon of canning salt. Next, fill jars with morels, add room temperature distilled water, and pressure cook for 30 minutes at 10 pounds pressure. Again, the canning water should be reserved for other uses.

Morels, like Three Mile Lake's

crappies, Clear Lake's yellow bass or Rathbun's walleyes, are delicacies best served fresh. But if you ever find yourself stuck with the mother lode, don't be afraid to save some for later.

Alan Foster is the managing editor of the Iowa Conservationist and a self-admitted morel novice.

Anyway Is The Right Way

While there may be some argument over butter versus margarine, or oil versus grease, most mushroom hunters will agree there is no wrong way to cook a morel.

Granted, there are some morel snobs who believe, to cover up the rich taste of Iowa's favorite fungi is sacrilege, the truth is, the meaty morel serves well in any role — as an appetizer, side dish, ingredient or even a main dish, for breakfast, lunch or supper.

Pan-frying is hands-down the most popular method of cooking morels. The culinary jury is split

only on a few minor issues, like cracker- or flour-coated versus uncoated, and butter versus oil. But in any form, pan-fried morels are perfect compliments to any dish.

But when the refrigerator overfloweth, and your butter-fried tolerance is at its max, don't be afraid to substitute morels in any dish that calls for the more common button, portobello or any other cultivated mushroom. Whether it's omelettes, pizzas, pasta sauces or casseroles, the indescribable flavor of Iowa's most sought-after 'shroom adds richness to any meal.

While the most popular method of preparing morels is fried in butter, in reality, there is no wrong way to cook a morel mushroom.

Lowell Washburn



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Weekends, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., (CST)
Oct. 1 - Jan. 31
7 days a week, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.
(CST)

Each campsite has a photo and detailed description on the web site.

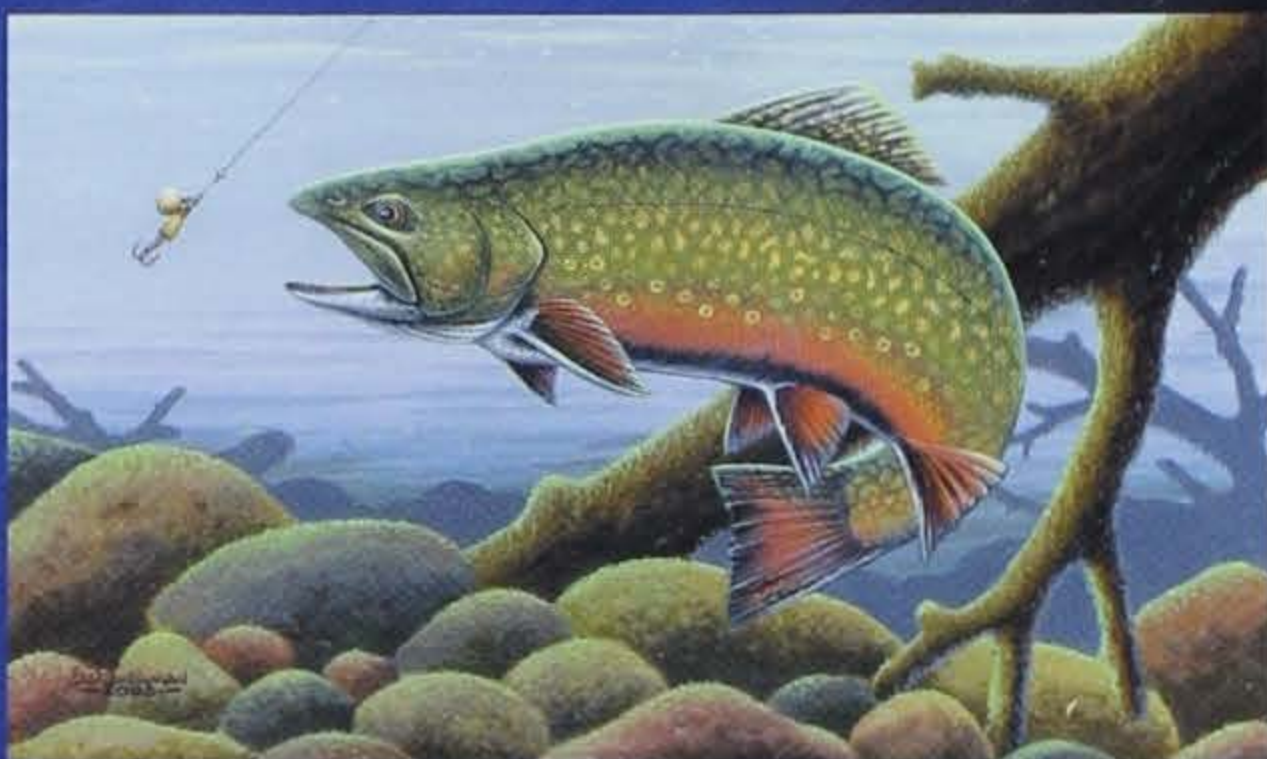
Each campground has a map including which sites are reservable, and a layout of the campground facilities.

Online reservations may be paid for by credit/debit card only. Phone-in reservations must be paid for by credit/debit card, check, money order or camping coupons.

An equal number and type of campsites will be available using the traditional method of first come, first served.

Reservations cannot be made for Free Camping Weekend, May 5, 6 and 7, 2006

COLLECT ALL THREE



GREG Bordignon

Born and raised in central Illinois, Greg Bordignon grew up fishing and hunting the streams and fields just south of Springfield.

In 1977 he moved to Cedar Rapids, Iowa, to pursue his B.A. degree in fine arts at Mt. Mercy College. That same year he started working as an artist at the Jym Bag Company. After graduating in 1981, he became art director, where he remains today. His outdoor art appears under the trade name, North American Outfitters, on hundreds of thousands of T-shirts and sweat-shirts all across the country.

Greg began painting wildlife art in 1992. His work has appeared on the covers of the 1992 and 1994 Iowa hunting and trapping rules and regulations, and inside the Iowa Conservationist Magazine. He also has several Iowa habitat and trout stamp designs to his credit, including this year's pictured above.

STAMP designs 2006



SHERRIE RUSSELL Meline

Sherrie Russell Meline, nationally recognized wildlife artist, is the Iowa Migratory Game Bird Stamp artist for 2006. A professional artist since the mid-1970, she has always been interested in art and her talent has been apparent and acknowledged since early childhood.

Born in Madison, Wisconsin, Sherrie attended high school in Tokyo, Japan, and in 1972 she graduated with honors in fine art from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Her professional career began in San Jose, California in 1974 when she applied her unique painting style to laminated wood sculpture. Although a decoy collector since her college days, Sherrie's interest in waterfowl was not expressed in her work until after she moved to Mount Shasta, California in 1980.

Sherrie and her husband, Kevin, distribute her limited edition prints nationally through their gallery, Wingbeats of Mt. Shasta.

Since 1982, Sherrie has been a member of the Pacific Flyway Decoy Association and has served on the Board of Directors since 1986. In 1990, Ducks Unlimited appointed her as Honorary National Trustee. She is a life member of California Waterfowl Association and a major donor to California Waterfowl Association, Ducks Unlimited, National Wild Turkey Federation, Pheasants Forever, Quail Unlimited and The Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation.

Volunteers help preserve "Iowa's oceans"

by Michael Dhar

Hundreds of years ago, "oceans" covered Iowa. Today, though only a small fragment remains, people who know where to look can still dip a toe into those mostly vanished seas.

In fact, several hundred Iowans do much more than that every spring. Thanks to the annual Statewide Prairie Rescue, many volunteers actually dive right in and help save those bits of "ocean."

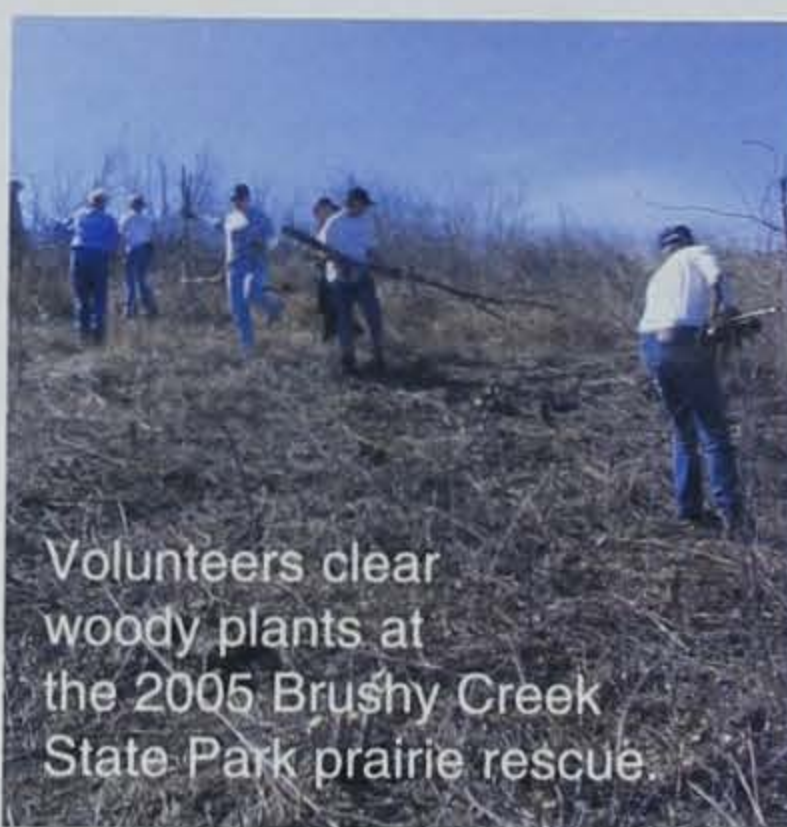
This all happens in prairie grasslands, often described as the Midwest's "seas." At one time, they blanketed the state in a sweeping expanse of grasses and flowers. When the first western settlers arrived, this area supported an incredibly diverse ecosystem, one stretching for thousands of miles and rejuvenated by enormous fires.

Today, less than one-tenth of 1 percent of Iowa's prairies remain, though they once covered 80 percent of the state. Since 2001, however, the Statewide Prairie Rescue has given the public firsthand experience of that small remnant.

"We want people to understand Iowa's prairies," said Cathy Engstrom, communications director for the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation, one of the program's sponsors. "We want them to know what an important ecosystem it is, and how beautiful it is."

Statewide Prairie Rescue

consists of 20 to 30 individual events occurring across the state in March, April and May. Volunteers come to state parks, patches of private land and other plots of remnant or recovered prairie to help remove invasive woody species — that is, trees. Participants cut, saw,



Michael Dhar

chemically treat and sometimes burn invaders that crowd native grasses.

In a natural ecosystem, Engstrom said, prairies would combat such woody plants on their own. A genuine grassland, one that stretched for miles, would welcome periodic cleansing fires, which destroy trees and at the same time crack open prairie grass seeds so they can germinate.

By taking on the role of those long-ago fires, volunteers reconnect with Iowa's natural heritage, Engstrom said. They also take part in a fun and educational outing.

Last year, Iowa City Girl Scout leader Judy O'Donnell took her troop of budding naturalists to a rescue at Breen Prairie, near Monticello. The activity proved a

perfect match for her scouts, O'Donnell said.

"This event embodied a lot of things we try to get our Girl Scouts involved in," she said. "Being outdoors, learning, serving and caring for the environment. And they had a really great time."

The prairie rescue events also produce clearly visible results, said Mark Edwards, trail coordinator with the Iowa DNR, another of the event's sponsors.

"In a day, the difference that a group of people can make is pretty amazing to me," he said.

All volunteers, by helping save prairie fragments, provide a service to future Iowans, and to the species with which we share the land, Engstrom said.

"One of the statements that moves me was naturalist Aldo Leopold comparing prairies to the great ancient libraries," she said. "It almost makes you cry to think what was lost when those were destroyed. It's the same thing with prairies. They are libraries of DNA, species we could never get back."

Volunteer Opportunities

* Statewide Prairie Rescue: Visit www.inhf.org/rescue2006.htm for details.

* Operation ReLeaf and Plant Some Shade spring tree distributions. Please visit on-line events calendar at: www.keepersoftheland.org



Creole Crappie

Coming from the state with the phrase Sportsman's Paradise stamped right on its license plates, it would be logical that Robert Beasley, executive chef at Mojo's on 86th in Johnston,

would know his way around a fishing reel. He does. But his 100-hour work-week doesn't allow him much time to put that knowledge into practice.

Beasley, 42, did get out a few times last summer and fished in farm ponds west of Adel. He and his cohorts caught 6-pound bass and pound-and-a-half crappies. And yes, as a professional chef, he was tasked with cooking them. Ahh, nothing beats fresh fish.

Beasley has been a professional chef in New Orleans,

Houston, Dallas, Kansas City and in the Des Moines area for more than 22 years. He is a graduate of the Culinary Institute of America, in Hyde Park, N.Y. For the *Iowa Conservationist*, Beasley took some Iowa-caught crappies and dressed them with some Big Easy style.

A large cast iron skillet went over a high gas flame and it didn't take long to heat up. "A cast iron skillet is best for blackening," he said as he coated some crappie filets with his own mix of Cajun seasonings. "Get it rock'n hot; smok'n hot." A shot of extra virgin olive oil and in go the filets. He said any off-the-shelf Cajun or Creole seasoning would work.

To contrast the texture and seasoning of the blackened fish, he rolls more filets in a mixture of seasoned flour, and blue and yellow corn meal, and then drops them into hot oil.

Next, Beasley works on the

Mojo's
on 86th

Article by Mick Klemesrud
Photos by Jeff Myrom

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Johnston, IA 50131
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Recipes

Beasley's Cajun Mix

2 tsp each of kosher salt,
granulated onion and
granulated garlic
1/2 tsp cayenne pepper
1-1/2 tsp coarse black pepper
1 tsp white pepper
4 tsp each of leaf thyme and
leaf oregano
3 tsp paprika

Sauce

Place 2 tsp olive oil in skillet
and place over high heat.
Add 3 ozs crawfish tail meat
1 T each of Cajun spices and
green onions
2 T white wine
1/2 cup heavy whipping
cream
1/4 cup shredded Asiago
cheese
Bring to a boil. Reduce heat
and simmer until thickened.

sauce -- a shot of extra virgin olive oil in a small, hot, sauce pan, a handful of crawfish tails, a ladle of cream, some white wine, some Asiago cheese and more Cajun seasoning. The fish are turned once, then the heat turned off. The high heat will sear in the juices, he said.

As the sauce reduces, Beasley prepares the plate with grilled vegetables, then places the blackened filets on the vegetable pile, then the fried filets. Here comes the sauce, topped with green onions and more cheese.

He said an Australian sauvignon blanc would cut through the spices and go nicely with the meal. Rice could replace the grilled vegetables and spices can be adjusted to taste.

To avoid problems cooking thin fish like crappie, cook at high heat and cook it quickly, he said. That will lock in the flavor and give the fish a nice texture.



CONSERVATION UPDATE

Iowa Pheasant License Plate Ranked Fifth Best In North America

Iowa's new specialty license plate featuring a pheasant placed fifth in voting for the 2005 Best License Plate award, according to the Automobile License Plate Collectors Association (ALPCA). The annual contest covers the U.S. and Canada.

Designed by Cedar Rapids artist Greg Bordignon, the plate was one of two new natural resource money-raising plates, prompted by the Iowa DNR, that became available last fall. It features a rooster pheasant springing into flight with a ghosted farmscape background. The other new plate is an eagle taking flight over a ghosted image of the Mississippi River.

Both plates join the 10-year-old goldfinch and wild rose plate in generating revenue for Iowa's Resource Enhancement and Protection (REAP) program. REAP provides funding for city, county and state parks and



Greg Bordignon

conservation areas, soil and water quality, historical preservation and conservation education. A year ago, the price of the plates was increased to \$45 to purchase and \$25 for annual renewal so that they could also begin supporting the wildlife diversity program.

"The natural resources plate is popular with collectors for its attractive design," according to ALPCA spokesman Eric Gustafson. Voting is currently underway and will be completed by ALPCA members in early March.



Iowa AmeriCorps Reaches 1 Million Hours Of Service

Iowa AmeriCorps members reached a major milestone recently when they broke the 1 million-hour mark for direct service to the state since 2000.

Members of the Iowa Department of Natural Resources' AmeriCorps Keepers of the Land program contributed greatly to the effort, logging 235,679 service hours over the last five years.

The DNR first employed AmeriCorps members on a widespread scale in 1999. Today, the department draws on the talents of 47 members, an increase of nearly four times the number of original members.

Iowa AmeriCorps members have contributed more than \$17 million in services to the state since 2000, based on the Bureau of Labor Statistics and Independent Sector Coalition's estimates of the value of volunteer service.

The national AmeriCorps program was established in 1994 to engage Americans in community-based service. In exchange for one year of service, members receive an education stipend.

For more information on AmeriCorps, call visit www.volunteeriowa.org. For more information on AmeriCorps Keepers of the Land contact Linda Terry at Linda.Terry@dnr.state.ia.us or at (515) 281-3079.

Bald Eagle Numbers Dip Slightly in 2005, But Population Still Strong

The annual midwinter bald eagle survey counted nearly 2,600 bald eagles in Iowa, which is down from the previous two

years, but still above the 10-year average of 2,180.

Midwinter survey results for 2004 found 4,384 eagles, compared to 3,164 in 2005. The lower count may be attributed to warmer temperatures and less ice coverage on area rivers. Previous winters were colder with more ice cover, factors that concentrate the eagles and make them easier to count.

"The large amount of open water most likely allowed eagles to spread out along the water-courses, making them harder to count and I think that played a key role in the slightly lower numbers this year," said

Stephanie Shepherd of the Iowa Department of Natural Resources' wildlife diversity program.

As usual, the Mississippi River had the most eagles in the survey with 60 percent, followed by the Des Moines River with 20 percent. The survey found 38 percent of the bald eagles counted were immature, which continues to indicate the population is stable or growing.

"Overall, the news is that Iowa's bald eagle population continues to be stable and healthy and provides many Iowans with opportunities to see these majestic birds," Shepherd said.

Iowa survey results will be added to the Midwest regional and national data that will provide a more complete picture of the health of the bald eagle population.



Ty Smedes

License Buyers Donate More than \$10,000 To Turn In Poachers Program

Hunters and anglers have donated more than \$10,000 since September to the Iowa Turn In Poachers program through a \$2 donation offered through the Electronic Licensing System for Iowa. The Iowa Department of Natural Resources presented the TIP Iowa Board a \$10,000 check in February.

The donations are used by the private TIP organization for reward payments to informants

on successful Iowa TIP cases and for promoting the program.

"This money was donated voluntarily by Iowa license buyers that will directly help the TIP program, to help protect the wild resources here in Iowa, and the hunters and anglers in our state," said Steve Derman, TIP board representative for the Iowa DNR.



Jerry Dowell

Steve Derman, right, presents a \$10,000 check to TIP Board president Russ VonBehren.

CONSERVATION UPDATE

National Survey Examines Wants And Needs Of Duck Hunters

Iowa Responses Reflects Current Trends

The National (waterfowl) Flyway Council has released results of a nationwide survey asking America's duck hunters for opinions on ducks, duck hunting and waterfowl management. According to Flyway Council chair Don Childress, more than 10,000 duck hunters responded to this first-of-its-kind national survey.

The survey revealed modern-day duck hunters are a highly motivated group of conservationists who take waterfowling issues very seriously. A full 72 percent of respondents listed duck hunting as their most important, or one of their most important, recreational activities. About 60 percent agreed with the length of their hunting seasons, and three-quarters said the daily bag limit on ducks was "about right."

Almost two-thirds (65 percent) of surveyed duck hunters said they spend more than \$250 each year on duck hunting and 20 percent said they spend more than \$1,000.

Only 6 percent of duck hunters between the ages of 45 and 64 indicated that they began duck hunting in the relatively recent past (1997-2004).

Survey results were reported by upper, middle and lower groupings of states in each flyway. These groupings allow for the most meaningful comparisons among regions of the country, said Childress. For example, more than 30 percent of the waterfowlers hunting in the upper portion of the Central Flyway (North Dakota, South Dakota and eastern Montana) said the overall quality of duck hunting over the last five years had improved, while 29 percent of the same group said it had gotten worse. By contrast, 82 percent of the duck hunters using the lower portion of the Mississippi Flyway (Alabama, Arkan-



Lowell Washburn

sas, Louisiana, Mississippi and Tennessee) said hunting had gotten worse.

In the national survey, 76 percent of the duck hunters questioned said they hunted all of the past five seasons. In Iowa, 82 percent of the state's duck hunters hunted all 5 of the past five seasons.

Nationally, 72 percent of duck hunters said the total daily duck bag limit in the state they hunted was "about right." In Iowa, 79 percent of the hunters interviewed thought the bag limit was "about right."

Other survey findings show that contemporary duck hunters — especially the younger ones — readily embrace current technology. Twenty percent of duck hunters said they "frequently" access the Internet for duck hunting information; 49 percent said "once in a while," and 31 percent, "not at all."

In the national average, 53 percent of surveyed hunters said they used spinning-wing (mechanical) decoys, which compared to 67 percent in Iowa. Both surveys revealed that a majority of duck hunters thought spinning-wings should be allowed. Nationally, and in Iowa, less than 25 percent thought mechanical decoys should be outlawed.

By Lowell Washburn

Local Watershed Projects Showing Results

Conservation practices on agricultural and urban land are making a difference in the amount of pollutants reaching Iowa's waters.

Local watershed projects are the difference-makers. Projects work with landowners to install conservation practices in the watershed — the area of land that drains into a lake or stream. Common conservation practices include wetlands, ponds, terraces and buffers. These practices reduce the amount of pollutants — sediment, nutrients and bacteria — reaching a lake or stream.

Sediment can make water cloudy, damage fish and other aquatic life habitat, and fill in lakes and streambeds. High levels of nutrients, like phosphorus, can cloud the water, increase drinking water costs and lead to poor aquatic life diversity.

The DNR funds a number of local watershed projects that improve Iowa's water. Of those, 22 reported on practices installed

during federal fiscal year (FFY) 2005. From Oct. 1, 2004 to Sept. 30, 2005, those conservation practices reduced sediment reaching streams and lakes by at least 23,396 tons per year. That's equal to about 2,600 dump trucks full of soil each year. They also reduced phosphorus reaching streams and lakes by at least 42,685 pounds per year.

These conservation practices will continue to reduce pollutants at the same rate if they are properly maintained.

Lake Darling is just one of the watershed projects showing success. Without conservation practices, more than 16,000 tons of sediment were reaching Lake Darling every year. Initial conservation practices reduced that number to 10,444 tons per year. In the last five years, other efforts have further reduced the amount of sediment reaching the lake to 6,978 tons per year.

The Section 319 program of the EPA provides DNR funding for nonpoint pollution programs.

Water samples taken from Lake Darling, show a marked improvement in water clarity. Local watershed projects have prevented roughly 9,000 tons of sediment from entering the lake every year.



Clay Smith

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. 9th St., Des Moines, Iowa 50319-0034.

Natural Resource Commission:

- April
No meeting
- May 11
Waubensie/WaShawtee
- June 8
Whiterock Conservancy

Environmental Protection Commission:

- April 17
Urbandale
- May 15
Urbandale
- June 19
Urbandale

State Preserves Advisory Board:

- April 14
Wapello County

WARDEN'S DIARY



I'm afraid I don't watch much TV. When I do, it's usually just news, sports and old movies, most often *Shane*, one of my all-time favorites. In fact, I am sure my wife shakes her head when I sit down to watch that classic for the 500th time, then thinks I've completely lost it when I mutter, "Shane, come back" at the end.

Outside of that, I couldn't tell you the names of most regularly scheduled programs. And despite what some may think, I DON'T watch cop shows. When I get home, I do my best to shut off the cop switch.

So, when a friend came up to me not too long ago and asked if I had watched *CSI* the night before, it was no surprise that I answered "CS who?" I later found out *CSI* is about crime scene investigators using new technology to solve major crimes. And it's all done in the space of 60 minutes, commer-

cials included. I think there might be a lot they are leaving out.

It did, however, remind me of a call I got my first year on the job. The caller provided directions to where some deer had been shot and apparently dragged out of a field. It was winter, the deer seasons were over and the snow cover was thick.

was hope for a break.

I knocked on doors of nearby farms asking if anyone had seen or heard anything the night before. Everyone shook their heads, and I was starting to think this would be one that got away. Then, I knocked on another door and a man opened it. I asked him the same question, not really expecting to

He gave us the Elmer Fudd defense, telling us he had been hunting rabbits. Given the fact deer hair has some characteristics that are pretty obvious, his explanation didn't hold much water.

I followed the directions, looked out into a field, and found not one, but two obviously fresh blood trails where something had been dragged out of the field. Dragging had effectively obscured any footprints, and traffic had taken care of tire tracks.

There was nothing else to go by. I stood there and listened, but the scene was not speaking to me. No empty cartridge cases. Nothing. All I could do

hear anything that would help.

"There was a guy who stopped here late last night," he said. "He had run out of gas and wondered if he could buy some."

"Have you seen him before?"

"Yes, a couple of years ago I called because he was shooting at deer with a rifle on my property." He also gave me a description of what he was driving.

Bingo!

I took the suspect's name and started to do some record checks. I soon found out where he lived and, wouldn't you know it, records showed the car he owned matched the description the farmer gave me. I drove to the guy's house, but no one was home. Interestingly, there was blood on the ground in front of the closed overhead door. I called for reinforcements.

Asking around, it didn't take long to find out the guy's wife worked at a local eatery. We stopped there, had a cup of coffee and asked her if she minded if we took a look in their garage. The answer was pretty direct. "Now what has he been doing? I don't care, go ahead."

Back we went. The garage was unlocked. Imagine our surprise to find two ropes hanging from the rafters, with blood pooled below them. We took some samples of the blood, and of the hair found caught in the rope fibers.

Not long after, a car pulled in. Sure enough, it was the guy, who was naturally curious why we were in his garage. We, on the other hand, were curious why there

was blood and hair on his rear bumper. We asked him to open his trunk. More blood, more hair. To this day, I still laugh at his response. He gave us the Elmer Fudd defense, telling us he had been hunting rabbits. Given the fact deer hair has some characteristics that are pretty obvious, his explanation didn't hold much water. We sampled the blood and the hair in the car.

Notwithstanding the rabbit story and being born at night — just not last night — we charged him with illegal possession of deer, even though we still hadn't found the bodies of any deer.

The next day, I took everything to the DCI crime lab in Des Moines. DNA testing was still somewhat in its infancy

back then, but they were able to tell me the blood and hairs came from deer.

Blood and hair on some glass slides under a microscope closed the case. That's what CSI doesn't show you. The bells and whistles usually are combined with "old fashioned" police work.

A liberal dose of good fortune doesn't hurt either.

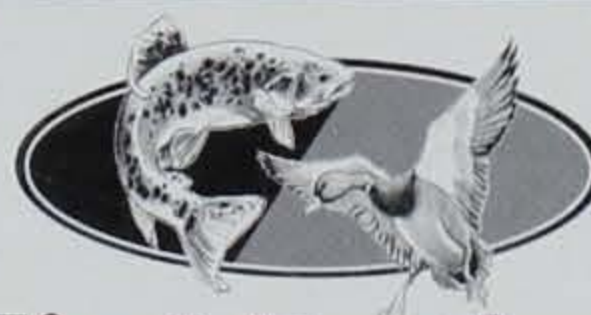
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