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THE DNR'S MAGAZINE

JANUARY / FEBRUARY 2016



IN THIS ISSUE:

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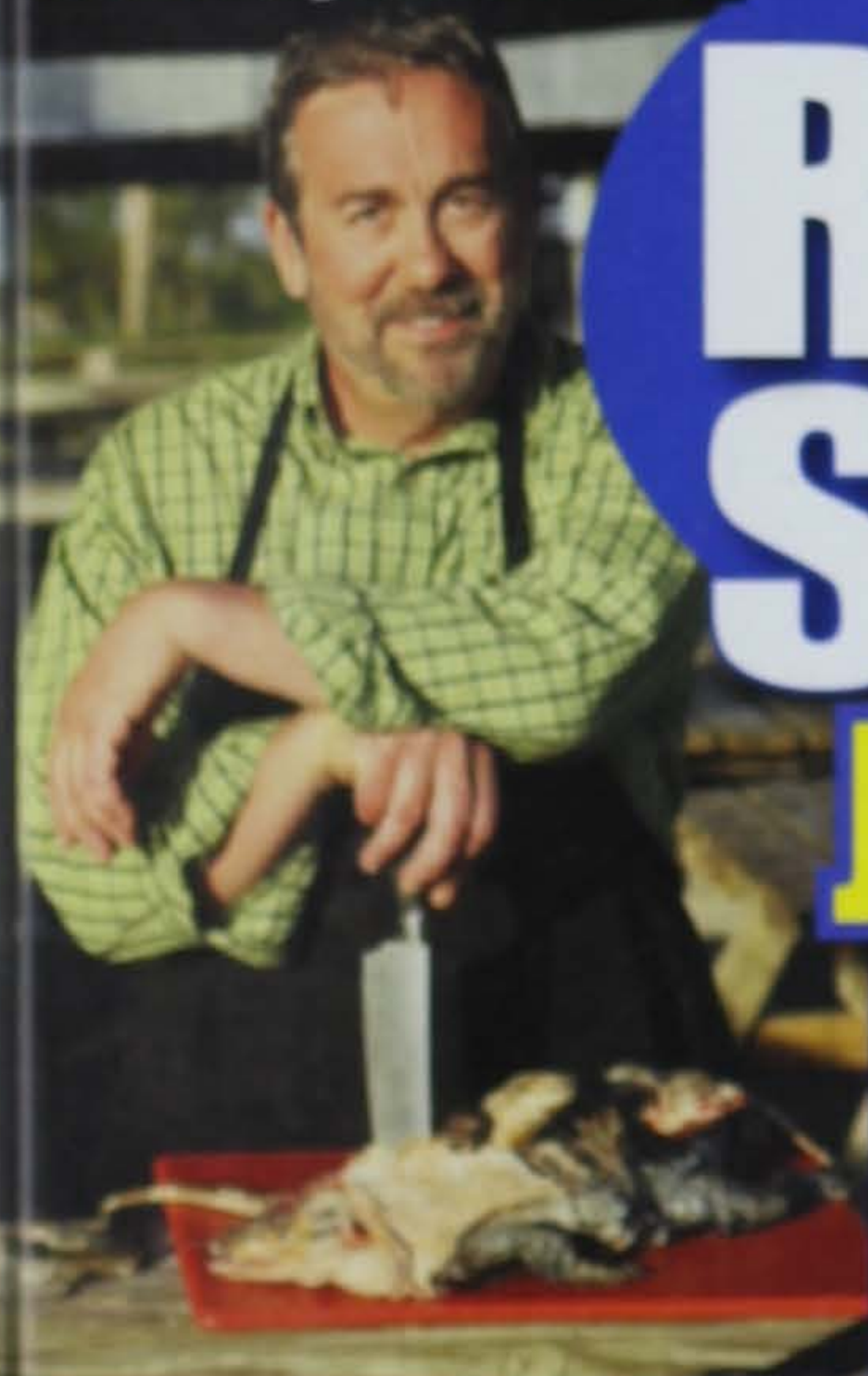
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Relatively new on the scene, fat bikes challenge riders to go places impossible with conventional bikes.

STORY BY AMARIAH GRIFFITH

PHOTOS BY JAKE ZWEIBOHMER

ABOUT THIS PHOTO

While trying to find a way to capture an image of the peeling bark of a birch tree at Bluffton Fir Stand State Preserve, photographer and writer Brian Gibbs discovered a uniquely placed red oak acorn cap in the crook of a tree. The preserve features the state's largest stand of balsam firs, a species more associated with Canada and the northeastern U.S. They are an enduring relic from thousands of years ago when Iowa was covered in boreal forest.

PHOTO BY BRIAN GIBBS



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62 Wild Cuisine

Mardi Gras is just around the corner and what better way to celebrate Fat Tuesday than with jambalaya. Atlas World Grill chef Jim Adrian, who got his start in New Orleans' number one rated restaurant, shares his version of this classic Creole dish.

66 Flora & Fauna

While golden eagles are more widely distributed than their more famous cousin the bald, their presence in Iowa is somewhat rare. Still, they are often found in small numbers along the Mississippi River, especially in northeast Iowa.

ABOUT THE COVER

The fearsome, stoic appearance of the golden eagle is indicative of its demeanor. Its hunting prowess was held in mystic reverence in some tribal cultures. For centuries they were the favored raptor for falconry, and used to kill prey as large as wolves. They have been documented protecting their kill by warding off marauding coyotes and bears—even attacking wild turkey and deer for food. See pages 21, 46-53 and 66 for more details.

ABOUT THIS PHOTO

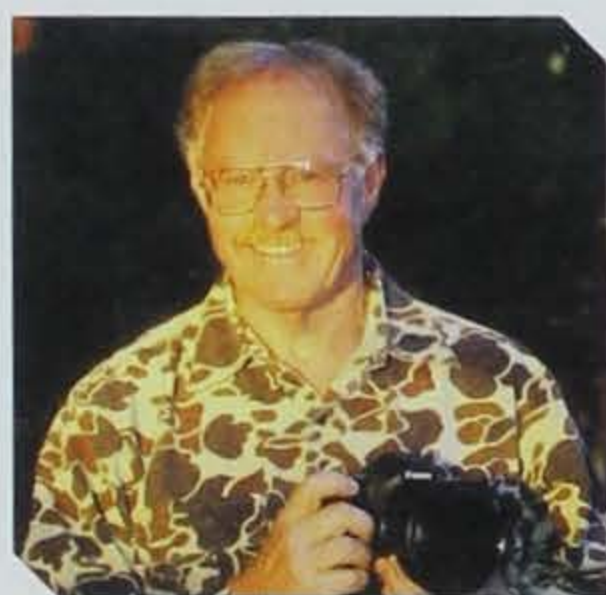
Fat bikes are popping up more and more, just not necessarily on traditional paved trails. These bikes, with 4-inch-plus tires, are designed to go places conventional bikes can't. See pages 54-59.

PHOTO BY JAKE ZWEIBOHMER

Contributors



BRIAN GIBBS, Clayton County naturalist, has been addicted to wild places ever since his father first took him trout fishing in Yellow River State Forest. His passion for teaching others about enjoying and conserving natural beauty has led him to work in such scenic places as Glacier National Park. When not teaching, Gibbs is exploring the natural beauty hidden among the bluffs and valleys of northeast Iowa.



TY SMEDES is a full-time writer and photographer from Urbandale. Published in dozens of magazines, his work includes images of wildlife, wildflowers and scenics. He teaches photography classes and leads photo tours to the Sierras and Africa. His recent book, *The Return of Iowa's Bald Eagles*, is sold at iowan.com or 1-877-899-9977 ext 211.



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Myth Busters

BY ALAN FOSTER

CAR WARMING

If you are still driving around blaring Journey or Michael Jackson on your cassette tape deck, you may still want to adhere to the age-old practice of warming your engine in the winter before heading to work or play. But if you have graduated to compact discs and satellite radio, save gas, cut back on emissions and head on down the road.

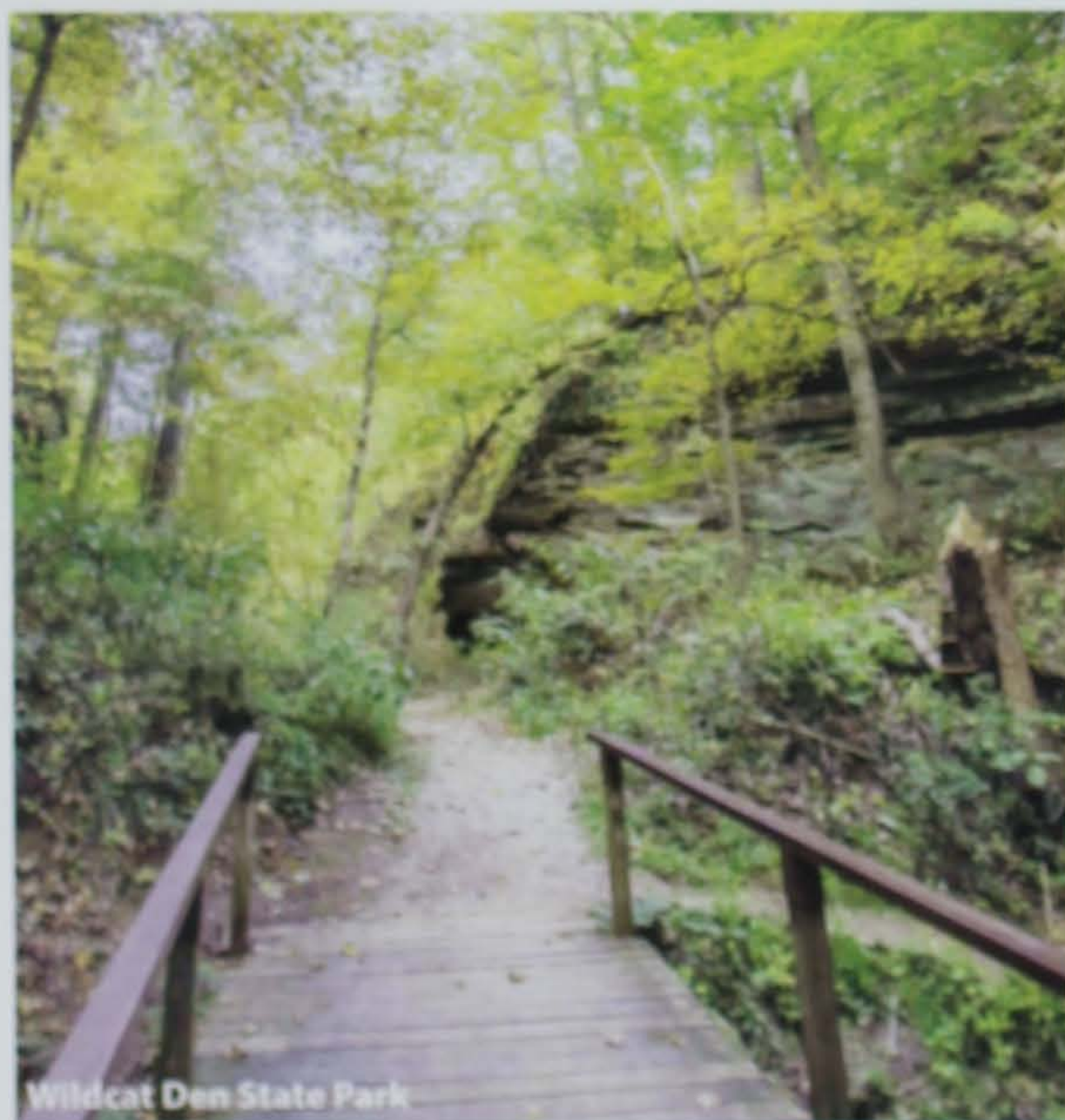
In the day of older engines, carburetors were the devices for getting the right mix of fuel and air to the engine. The mechanical process wasn't always efficient, especially when cold, sending too much of one or the other into the engine. The result was a seized engine or a smoky ride. Neither were good.

But the last carbureted engine was sold in 1990, and more efficient fuel-injected engines took their place. Sensors, unaffected by

temperatures, maintain proper ratio of fuel to air. So while the first mile or two of the commute might be chilly, your vehicle is equipped to get up and running the moment you need it.

Idling, whether in the driveway, at a stoplight or waiting to pick up a passenger, all burn unneeded fuel. According to Sustainable America, drivers spend an average of 16 minutes a day idling—the equivalent of driving eight miles. And the urban legend that starting a car burns more fuel than idling is all hot air.

The next time you are stuck in traffic, at a long red light or waiting for the kids, kill the engine. You'll save money at the pump and reduce CO2 emissions.



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NEW YEAR'S CHECKLIST



It's a new year. I don't do resolutions, so call this a 2016 Outdoor Checklist—places or events across Iowa for each month. Most are return trips for me, worth a second or 70th visit. Maybe it will remind you of a few special outdoor ports of call in the months ahead. (Look for the rest of this list, July through December, in the next issue.)

JANUARY EAGLE EYE

With cold and snow finally here, eagle watching will improve. You can see one or two about anywhere, but Mississippi River locks and dams are cold weather hot spots. Keokuk often reports 700 or so. I counted 300 two years ago within a half mile just above Clinton. Guttenberg and Bellevue have great viewing across the river from their riverfronts.

Just about every major spot along the Mississippi River, from Effigy Mounds near northeast Iowa's Harper's Ferry to Keokuk in southeast Iowa, hold bald eagle watching days. Events run January through March (search iowadnr.gov for "eagle watch events").

Of course, if the weather just isn't up to your liking, you can join millions of others worldwide who have viewed the famous Decorah eagles from the comfort of your home at raptorresource.org. Don't expect to view the original nest at the Decorah Fish Hatchery. The eagle duo built a new nest three years ago on private ground and has set up residence there.



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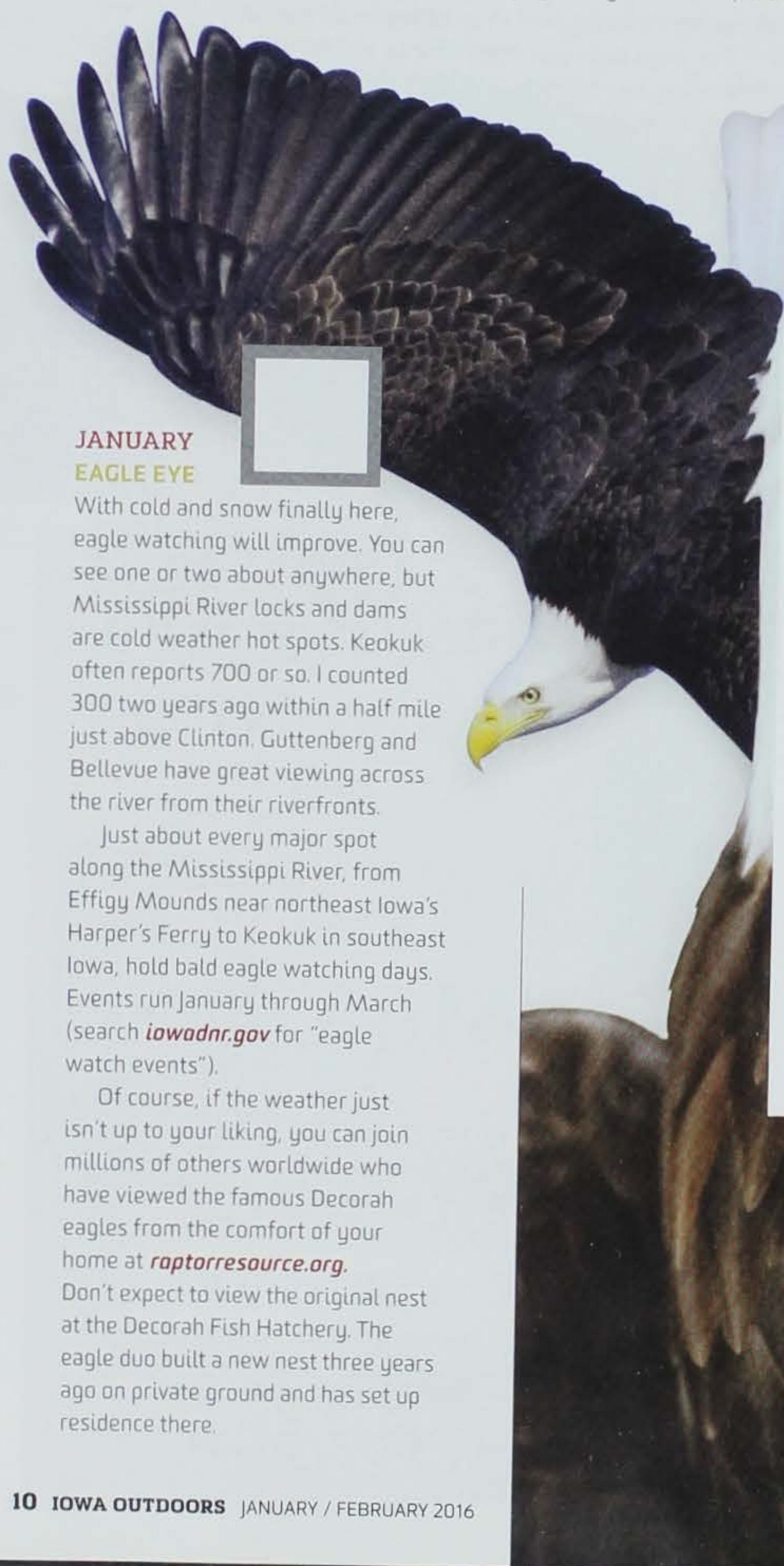


ACTIVITIES, TIPS AND EVENTS FOR THE WHOLE FAMILY

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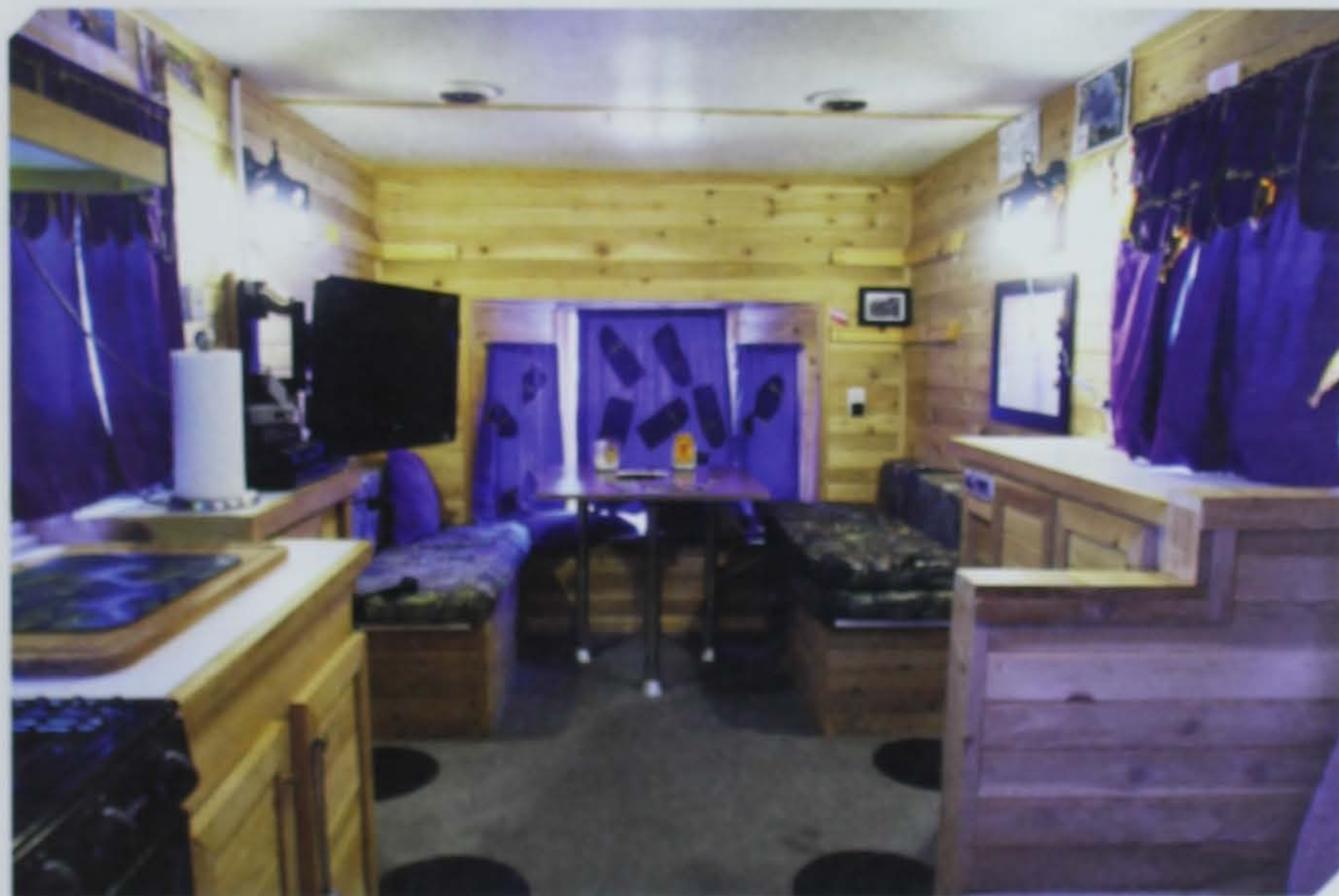
FEBRUARY

NO ORDINARY ICE SHACK

It's off to Clear Lake, to check out a couple ice fishing "palaces." These aren't your drag-behind plastic shells; they feature the comforts of home, plus holes in the floor for fishing. Besides electricity, satellite TV, kitchens, paneling and carpeting, some even have bunks, hydraulic lifts and more. Just add fish.

GO FLY A KITE

Schedule that ice fishing adventure to coincide with the Clear Lake Color the Wind Kite Festival. Join some 7,000 others at the Midwest's largest winter kite festival Feb. 20. Bring your own kite, or relax and watch huge, detailed kites for the most colorful display of the season. Banish the winter blahs as stunt teams perform with multiple kites flying choreographed routines set to music: colorthewind.org.



Together



MARCH (thru April) SPRING DANCE

It's dawn and calm in Ringgold County. Settle in for the show. Soon, 200 yards away, there should be a dozen or more prairie chickens. "It's Iowa's only lek...and quite a display. The males stomp their feet. They are 'booming,' purring, cackling, fighting," describes DNR wildlife biologist Chad Paup. "Generally every morning, almost every evening, they are displaying for the females. They inflate those beautiful, bright orange air sacs and eye combs." The viewing stand over the breeding grounds is two miles west of Kellerton, on 310th Avenue. Prairie Chicken Days is the weekend of April 2. Call **515-783-2166** for information on viewing or prospects for group tours.

GO INSIDE FOR YOUR OUTDOOR FIX

If March weather still isn't to your outdoor liking, get your nature fix at the National Mississippi River Museum and Aquarium. Marvel at giant catfish and sturgeon, turtles, wildlife and artifacts once or still common along the Mississippi River. Tour a 1934 steamer, spend the night in the crew's quarters and enjoy free programs, or catch a nature movie in the 4D theater. 350 East 3rd St. Dubuque, **800.226.3369**, rivermuseum.com.



PRAIRIE CHICKEN PHOTO BY RON HUELSE. MUSEUM PHOTO COURTESY OF NATIONAL MISSISSIPPI RIVER MUSEUM & AQUARIUM



APRIL

TOM FOOLERY

For me, the shrill, aggressive gobbles as an early season tom turkey closes in on decoys is the most exciting noise in Iowa's outdoors. Maybe because I have hardly heard the thunderous gobbles the last few years as I stumbled around new, unfamiliar hunting ground. Several times in the fall, though, I nearly stepped on birds as I walked into a tree stand location with more acorn-bearing oaks—and the cornfield just yards away. Some timber stand improvement this winter—whacking down encroaching soft maple and ash growth—should open a couple strut zones.



THE CAT IS OUT OF THE BAG

Once the spring turkey tag is full, it's time to focus on ice-out catfish. As water slowly warms, cats flock to shallow water to feast on dead fish. They are easy picking for someone with a jar of cut bait and a little bit of patience and knowledge. Smaller water bodies, like ponds and small lakes, are spring magnets. On bigger lakes, target windblown shorelines. If you can find a spot with the wind blowing into you at an angle, along a shoreline or across a point, even better. If you are on a point, target where the waves meet the slack water.



Together



WALLEYE WORLD

And who can forget the walleye opener on the Iowa Great Lakes, always the first Saturday in May. Nothing goes better with a plate of fried morels than an equal portion of fresh walleyes. This isn't just a fishing season opener, it's a celebration of the start of summer. Fish for fun, or join some 2,000 others vying for cash and prizes during the walleye weekend fishing tournament. Okobojichamber.com.



MAY MOREL MANIA

Definitely a return trip to my new morel hot spot. Not the Holy Grail of fungi finding, but it yielded dozens of fresh, yellow morels last spring. Where? Not telling. Hint? It's on public ground.

With a warm spring and "normal" precipitation, morels start popping in mid-April and continue into May. Last year, I had my best luck from May 12-25. It depends on location, soil moisture, location, temperature...oh, and location.



MOREL PHOTO BY MIKE KREBILL; WALLEYE PHOTO BY JAKE ZWEIBOHMER

JUNE

BLUEGILL BONANZA

This one's too easy. Fishing for bluegills with my granddaughters. We fish Lake Macbride, but about any lake or pond will do. The squeals, the enthusiasm as another "monster" 5-inch sunfish yanks their Spiderman poles are always worth the time. And after a half hour, my wife or I take whichever girl is bored on a nature hike. When she comes back, the pole is bending and she jumps right in. Most important? They see something new each time.

GET A JUMP ON CAMPING

And why not combine some of the greatest fishing of the year with some of the best camping? It's not too hot, not too cold, and pesky bugs have yet to gain a stronghold. There's nothing like fried fish and potatoes over an open campfire: ask anyone who has done a traditional shore lunch. Make it easier by securing a lakeshore campsite at lowstoteparks.reserveamerica.com, or 1-877-IAPARKS.



Together

BY HANNAH WILTAMUTH, Interpretive Programs Director At Honey Creek Resort State Park

SNOWED IN

As a child I looked forward to snow days, and honestly, not much has changed. A fresh coat of snow provided endless opportunities for outdoor play. I was a notoriously late sleeper as a child (again, not much has changed). Somehow, knowing there was an entire day of snow play ahead of me got me out of bed as quickly as a Christmas morning. A wonderful warm breakfast of bacon, tea and toast would start my day. After eating as quickly as possible I would be off to find my snow pants, two pairs of socks (and the bread bags to waterproof them), boots, play coat, gloves to be covered with mittens, a hat and a scarf. It might seem like overkill, but it was essential to stay warm so my outdoor play went uninterrupted by the chills.

I remember waiting in sweaty anticipation for my siblings to finish getting dressed and pass my mom's seal of approval before we could go outside. First order of business, when finally deemed bundled up enough to go outdoors, was to get the sled out of the shed. Luckily, Dad had chores that couldn't be put off because of snow, so he usually had the path cleared to get the shed door open. There were several options available, all of which would get their use. The metal saucer was perfect for spinning trips down the hill. The traditional runner sleds were also fun going down our small hill, but even better if I could convince Dad or a sibling to pull it for me. Lastly was the lightweight toboggan-style sled. We would take turns pushing one another down the hill. When sledding lost its thrill—or if someone had to run inside for something—we turned to making snow angels or silly imprints.

Snowmen were a staple of winter entertainment. Mine were usually so large I would need my dad's help to stack the large snowballs atop one another. I was never able to achieve the pristinely clean snowmen featured on countless cards and cartoons. Instead, mine were covered in fallen leaves and grass clippings which seemed to give it personality.

If we were lucky enough to get large drifts of snow, snow forts were in order. People go about making their forts in different ways. Some people make bricks of snow for building, others excavate a drift. Being safety conscious (OK, actually a bit lazy), I decided instead of cleaning out the insides of a snow drift, I would dig a small tunnel through the snow covering our picnic table. Less labor building meant more time playing. The collapse-proof design was an added safety factor I only realized in later years.

As I grew older my idea of snow play became more daring. The small sledding hill became entirely too small to keep me entertained. Luckily I had a 4-wheeler that could go through the snow—oftentimes with a sled behind it. It was a favorite game of ours to pull one another and try to shake the sledder. As expected, this sometimes ended in accidents leading me to give the caveat, "Don't try this at home."

Unfortunately, as we get older, snow days aren't always possible and it can be very easy to get caught up in the downfalls of winter snow clearing. But if you are lucky enough to get one of these days, take the opportunity to reconnect with your inner child. Get bundled up, run and play outside, jump in a snow drift and rediscover the excitement of a snow day.

OVER THE HILLS AND HOLLOW

A little snow and cold yields screams from some of the most economical winter fun. Bundle up in layers, pack a thermos of hot cocoa and head to the nearest sledding hill for a day of exhilaration and family fun. Best part is, these places below offer free or inexpensive tow ropes to sled all day without wearing out.

Seven Hills Park in Greene County, an 80-acre, largely undeveloped wooded park a mile south of Jefferson, offers a free tow rope Saturdays and Sundays when there is a minimum 4 inches of snow cover. A pit latrine, enclosed shelter house and tow rope are the only developments at the park. 1625 M Avenue; **515-386-5674**.

Ida County's **Moorehead Pioneer Park** features a tow-rope lift ticket for \$2, operated Sundays from 1:30 to 4:30 p.m. The 258-acre park in Ida Grove is steeped in history. Named for the Moorehead family who settled there in the 1850s and operated a stagecoach inn, it paints a picture of what life was like during settlement. The inn, a hand-hewn barn and a relocated schoolhouse and train depot still stand. The depot is used as a warming house. 202 Jasper Avenue; **712-364-3300**.

Horse Bend Recreation Area in Dickinson County offers tube rentals and tow rope for \$8 per person per day. Located at 19244 240th Street, Milford. 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Drive three miles south of Milford on highway 71 and 3 miles west on 240th Street. Restroom facilities. Opens Christmas break and every weekend after, weather permitting. Call **712-338-4786 Ext. 3** for conditions.



Honorable Mention

These parks may make you hoof it back up the hill under your own power, but they are definitely worth a trip if in the area. **Hitchcock Nature Center**, Pottawattamie County, 712-545-3283. Cabin rental and guided hikes available. **Hickory Hills County Park**, near Dykari, park at the boat ramp, walk over the bridge and through the woods for one-quarter mile (some bushes on hill), 3338 Hickory Hills

Road. **Hickory Hill Park**, Iowa City, broad terrace in the middle perfect for a light jump, 1439 Bloomington Road. **Kant Park**, Johnson County, park at the Bob White Pavilion Shelter, Hill faces west, Lower 35-degree hill with a few obstacles, 2048 Highway 6 NW, Oxford. **Jones Memorial Park**, Cedar Rapids, hours of fun on this giant hill with maintained toboggan run, 319-286-5760.



Together

WINTER ARCHERY COMES IN FROM THE COLD

Bridging the gap from fall hunting seasons to summer tournament circuits, a unique cold weather oasis beckons bowhunters and target shooters to northeast Iowa.

BY JOE WILKINSON PHOTOS COURTESY ECHO VALLEY ARCHERY CLUB

There aren't a lot of cold weather choices for Iowa archers. You can stand outside and freeze. Inside ranges are great, but space is tight. Some spice things up with a few three dimensional targets to test your eye. Beyond that, you might just as well count the days to warm weather.

Or head to **WEST UNION**. Follow the route through northeast Iowa to the Fayette County Fairgrounds and step into a bowhunter's dream. Last year, "The Junkyard" drew up to 450 archers on tournament weekends.

"There's nothing else like this around," declares shooter and Echo Valley Archery Club's Ward Fulmer between rounds of the 2015 season-closing BOWnanza. "This is for the

person who doesn't want to hang up his bow after the hunting season. You also get the more elite shooters, ramping up for the warmer weather 3D season. It's a little bit the best of both worlds."

It's an empty livestock show barn come to life after Echo Valley club members muster to work after the first week of December to set up a themed 3D archery range. Besides weekly shoots, they sponsor three full blown tournaments each winter. And they're packed. The 2016 "season" opens on the weekend closest to Jan. 10—when late muzzleloader hunting season closes.

It will be hard to beat "The Junkyard"—last winter's theme. In one corner, a 3D caribou stood

broadside. An elk filled the other. Between them was an old filling station, with a real gasoline pump, cedar trees and other landscape features. A rusty '48 Ford pickup anchored it all. Area sponsors purchased 40 3D targets, ranging from several whitetails to a "leaping" carp, snarling wolf, raccoon, wild hog, strutting turkey and others. The shots ranged from five to 45 yards.

Each year features a different theme; different backdrops, maybe some new targets. In 2015, The junkyard theme had people flocking in from around the upper Midwest: Wisconsin, Nebraska, Illinois, Minnesota, Michigan and all over Iowa.

"It baffles me how many people know about it, how far they come to



shoot here. When they're staying in our one motel, you know word has traveled," admits co-organizer Travis Wymer. "And pretty humbling to know people came that far, that we are developing that sort of reputation."

I followed a flight onto the course as patrons retrieved arrows and nearly stumbled over a 10-year-old boy who was pulling his from the plastic javelina.

"We see all skill levels. Some are shooting for the first time. Some compete on a professional level," observes Wymer. "My 4-year-old boy shoots. We have others who are 80." Prizes, and entry fees, are geared to the low end to encourage recreation and participation.

It looks like organized chaos, but

there is a plan. "We move targets around, angle them at different positions," outlines co-organizer Milo Thompson. "You have a different shot at every animal. Podiums are at different heights, so you have different angles. Then we have the trees, the bushes—distractions, I guess you'd call them."

The 14 shooting stations stretch the width of the barn, but space is limited. "We look at the starting points. We are concerned with the pressure—the comfort—of the shooter. We don't want a cross fire right in front of them. A lot of the targets get moved five or six times until we find a final location."

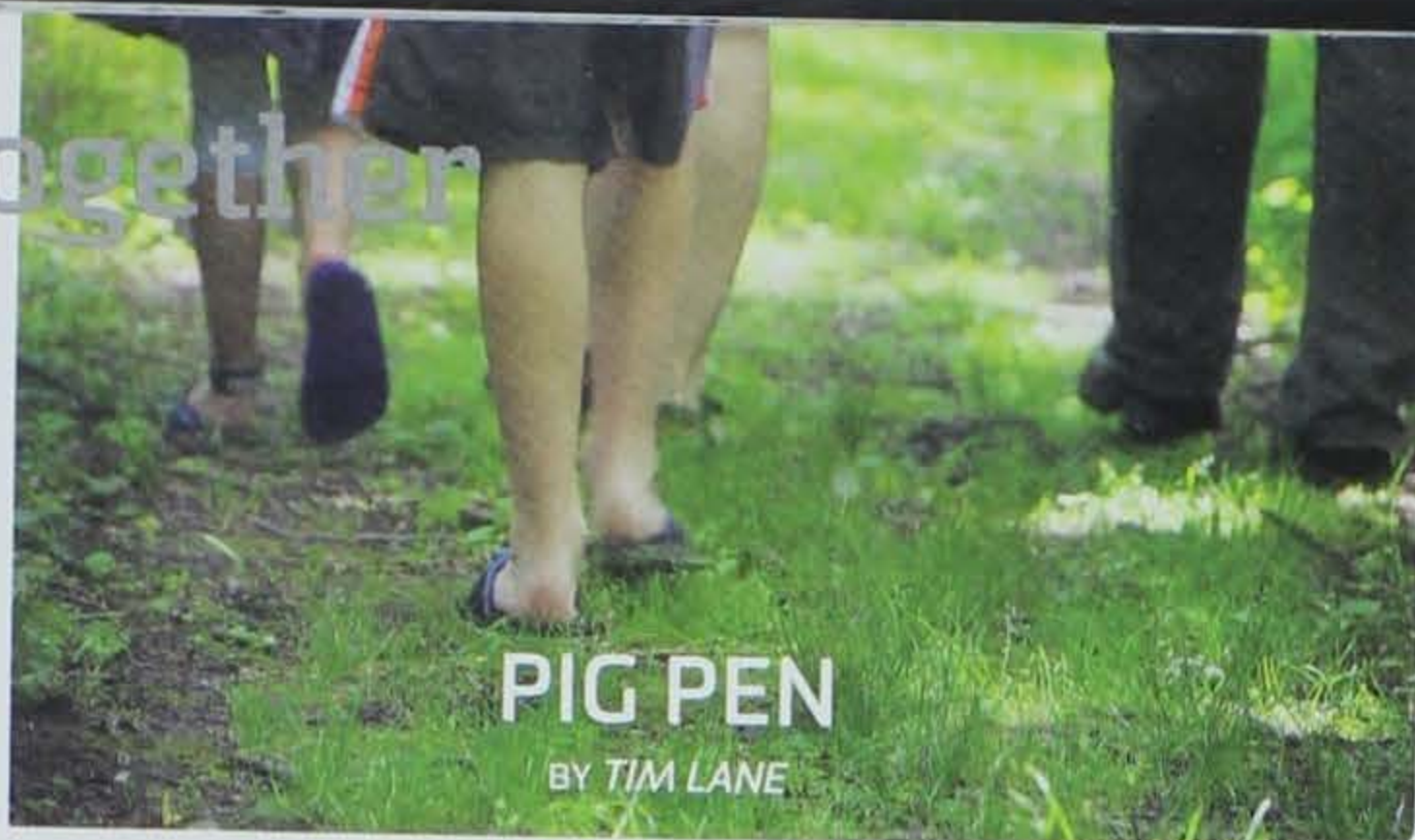
Register as you walk through the

door. The lunch counter is to your right. Practice? Just walk through a recently-insulated walkway to the building next door, where lanes are available. Then, as the last arrow "thunks" home in the season's last competition, the tear down begins. By the next afternoon, "the junkyard" is a county fair building once again, ready for the weekend cattle sale.

As the snow melts, the club begins gearing up for its big warm weather shoot in late August at nearby Volga Lake Recreation Area. From there, the planning picks up for the next winter's range.

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 563-380-7417

Together



PIG PEN

BY TIM LANE

As I write this column there has been a confluence of very interesting developments. Last September the movie version *A Walk in the Woods* was released. Later, the surgeon general released a call to action to promote walking and walkable communities called Step It Up! It even included his playlist that he listens to while walking! Then on the third week of the month, the media was abuzz about a fascinating study regarding the microbial cloud. In that work, from the University of Oregon, we discovered every person has a unique cloud of trillions of microbes.

The last item may help detect infectious diseases in hospitals, and thus lead to effective constraints. It could save lives, and in future CSI shows, lead to conviction of a killer. The study also made steady mention of the Peanuts character Pig Pen.

Snoopy's signature pose is sleeping on his doghouse. Schroeder mostly sits at his piano. Linus most often sits, holding his blanket. No one watches more TV than Sally. And although Charlie Brown attempts to fly kites, kick footballs and play baseball—most of his time is spent standing still, talking to others. It is Pig Pen who is the perennial pedestrian. And in September, he became the symbol for the microbe cloud we now know we all possess.

I am guessing that by now one can stream or see *A Walk in the Woods* on DVD. Just like the book, I highly recommend the movie. The movie does a great job demonstrating how Robert Redford, playing the role of Bill Bryson, can take off walking across the country, but in a town along the way finds it nearly impossible to walk from a hotel to the store across the street. That scene should have played when the surgeon general called for more walkable communities. It captured the unfortunate rut we have fallen into over the last half century.

According to the surgeon general, "One out of every two U.S. adults is living with a chronic disease, such as heart disease, cancer or diabetes." These contribute to disability, premature death and healthcare costs. Increasing physical activity will significantly reduce risks of diseases and related risk factors. Because physical activity has numerous other benefits—supporting positive mental health and healthy aging—it is one of the most important actions to improve overall health. Thus his Step It Up! campaign.

That campaign includes five goals to promote walking and walkable communities: make walking a national priority; design communities that make it safe and easy to walk for all ages and abilities; promote programs and policies to support walking where people live, learn, work and play; provide information to encourage walking and improve walkability; and fill research and evaluation gaps related to walking and walkability.

The Surgeon General's Call to Action to Promote Walking and Walkable Communities recognizes the importance of physical activity for people of all ages and abilities. And you can start by walking in a state park.

TIM LANE is a nationally recognized authority on public health and physical activity. He is past president of the Iowa Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance.

But Why?

Helping adults answer children's nature questions

BY A. JAY WINTER

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

BELLA, AGE 7, DAVENPORT ASKS:

Can we have tornadoes in winter in Iowa?

Because tornadoes usually require warm, humid air to form, it's not surprising winter tornadoes are rare in Iowa. But they can happen, and occur more frequently in the southern states during winter versus the Upper Midwest.

One of the best known winter tornados in Iowa occurred Jan. 24, 1967. A large storm developed in the Rocky Mountains and by noon, it was moving over central Iowa. A warm front stretched across central Iowa, and temperatures in southeast Iowa warmed into the 60s; a few places even set record highs. But it was a different story in northwest Iowa where temperatures were in the teens and single digits—with a snow storm in progress.

As the storm moved northeast, thunderstorms began to erupt in southern Iowa, moving east, producing a dozen tornadoes and killing one person in Lee County. The storm produced tornadoes into Wisconsin. The biggest tornado didn't occur in Iowa, but in the suburbs of St. Louis, where an F4 tornado tore a 21-mile path through suburban neighborhoods, killing three people and injuring more than 200.

Winter tornadoes can be particularly dangerous, not because they're stronger, but because they tend to move faster on the ground. The upper atmospheric winds that lead to winter tornadoes move faster than during warm months, and faster moving storms can mean less time to get out of the way.

According to the Weather Channel, the months with the highest average number of U.S. tornadoes are June (211), April (227) and May (270). Winter tornadoes are much rarer, with the nation averaging only 23 tornadoes in December, 39 in January and 96 in February—mainly in southern states.

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

Goldens vs. Balds

Differentiating between a golden eagle and an immature bald eagle can be challenging. But sharp-eyed observers can tell the differences in the wings. The underside of an immature bald eagle wing has mottled white patterns that extend just to the wing pits. The immature golden has distinct white patches at mid-wing, while the adult has dark undersides. The golden's head and beak are noticeably smaller than the bald's and protrudes about one-third as much from the body as the tail does. The bald eagle's larger head and neck extends a similar distance as the tail.

Golden Eagle

Immature bald eagle

SQUIRREL SKINNING 101

Skinning a squirrel doesn't have to end with difficult-to-remove hair left on the meat. Here's how. Make an incision between the tail and the anus cutting through the tailbone. Cut through the skin about an inch down each leg. Lay the squirrel on its back, stand on the tail and pull upwards on the back legs to peel the skin over the head. Grab remaining skin on underbelly and pull toward back legs until removed. Remove head, entrails and feet.

Winter Composting

Just because winter has hit doesn't mean your compost pile has quit. Yes, decomposition does slow down in colder months, but bacteria, mold and mites can survive and need energy to do their jobs. Keep that compost cooking by insulating the pile with hay bales, packed leaf bags, tarps or loose hay and leaves. Snow also acts as an insulator and provides moisture in the spring, but make sure you maintain access to the pile to continue adding matter. Reduce size of compost materials by cutting or chopping to speed decomposition. Bigger piles are most effective at keeping heat. Maintain a carbon (brown items) to nitrogen (green items) ratio of 20 or 40 to one. Higher carbon content piles stay drier and minimize freezing. Garden waste, such as vines, stalks and stems, can be left in piles on the bed to provide cover for animals. Simply till into the soil in the spring. Keep a lidded bucket in the house for kitchen scraps to minimize chilly trips to the pile.

Cabin Fever

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



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

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

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

Really, there's no reason to feel cooped up on this plot

of northeast Iowa, 55 miles east of Waterloo. It's like a self-contained entertainment unit, with a lake, woods, streams, the Maquoketa River and 21 miles of trails.

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

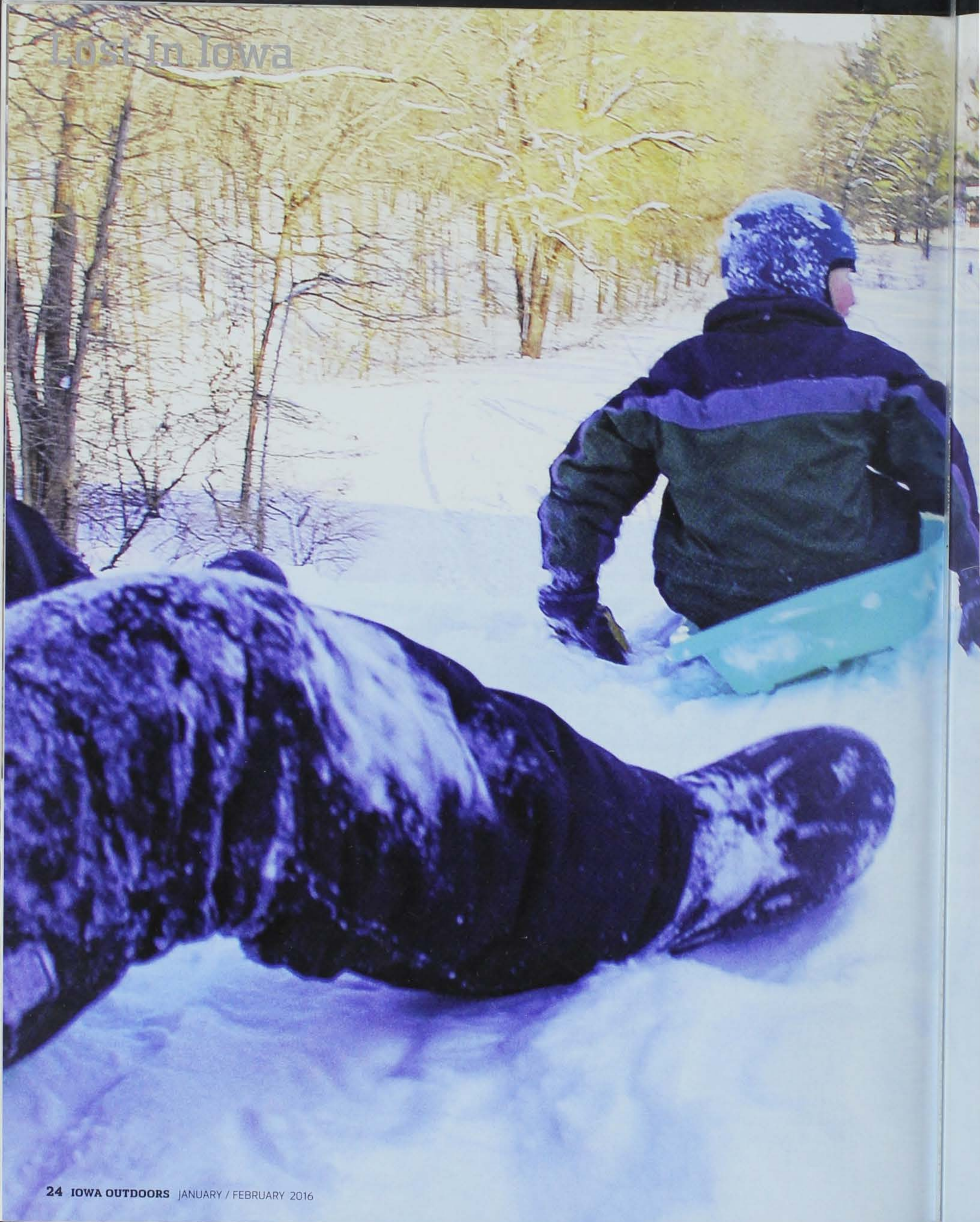
That trail

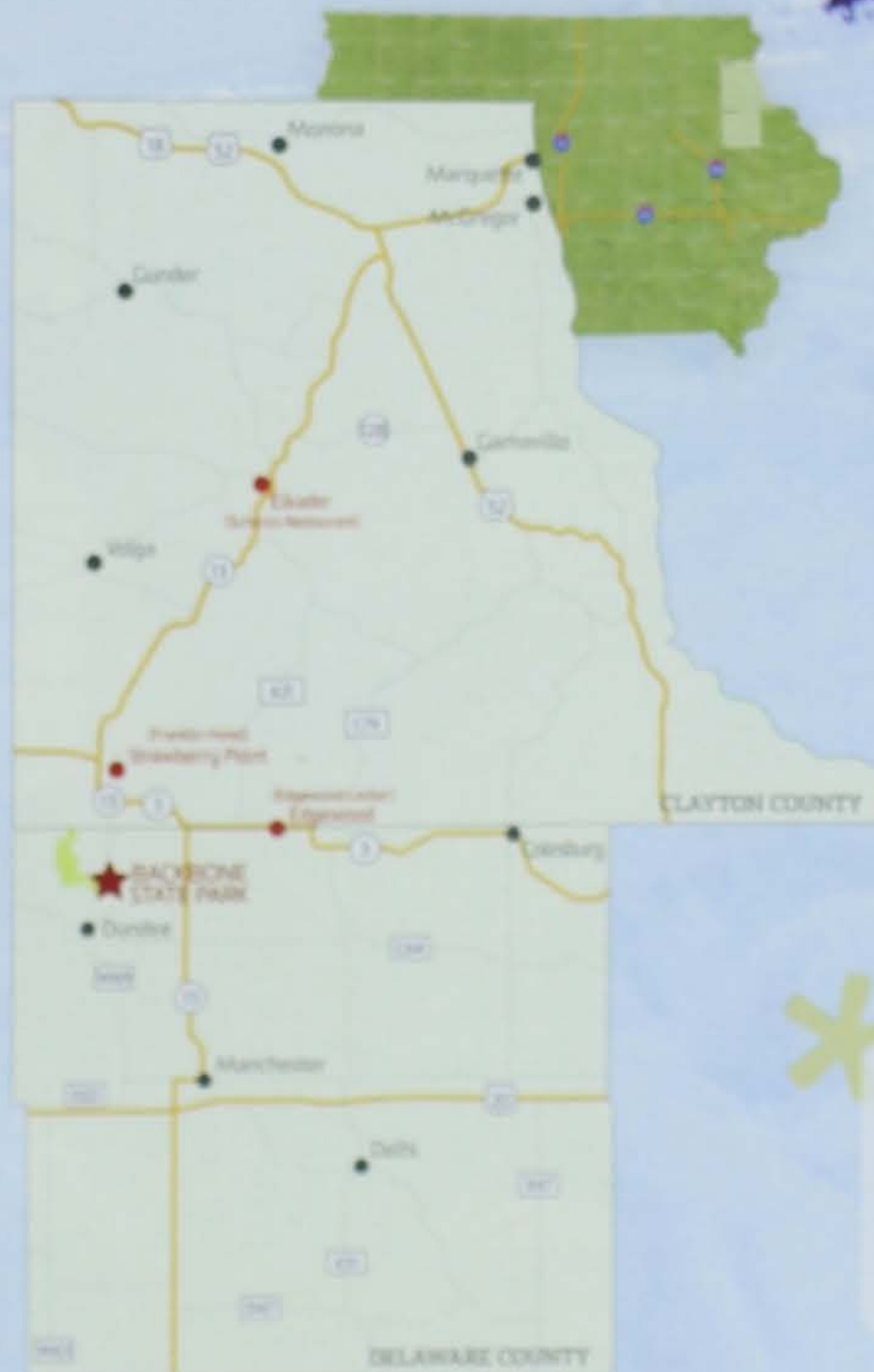
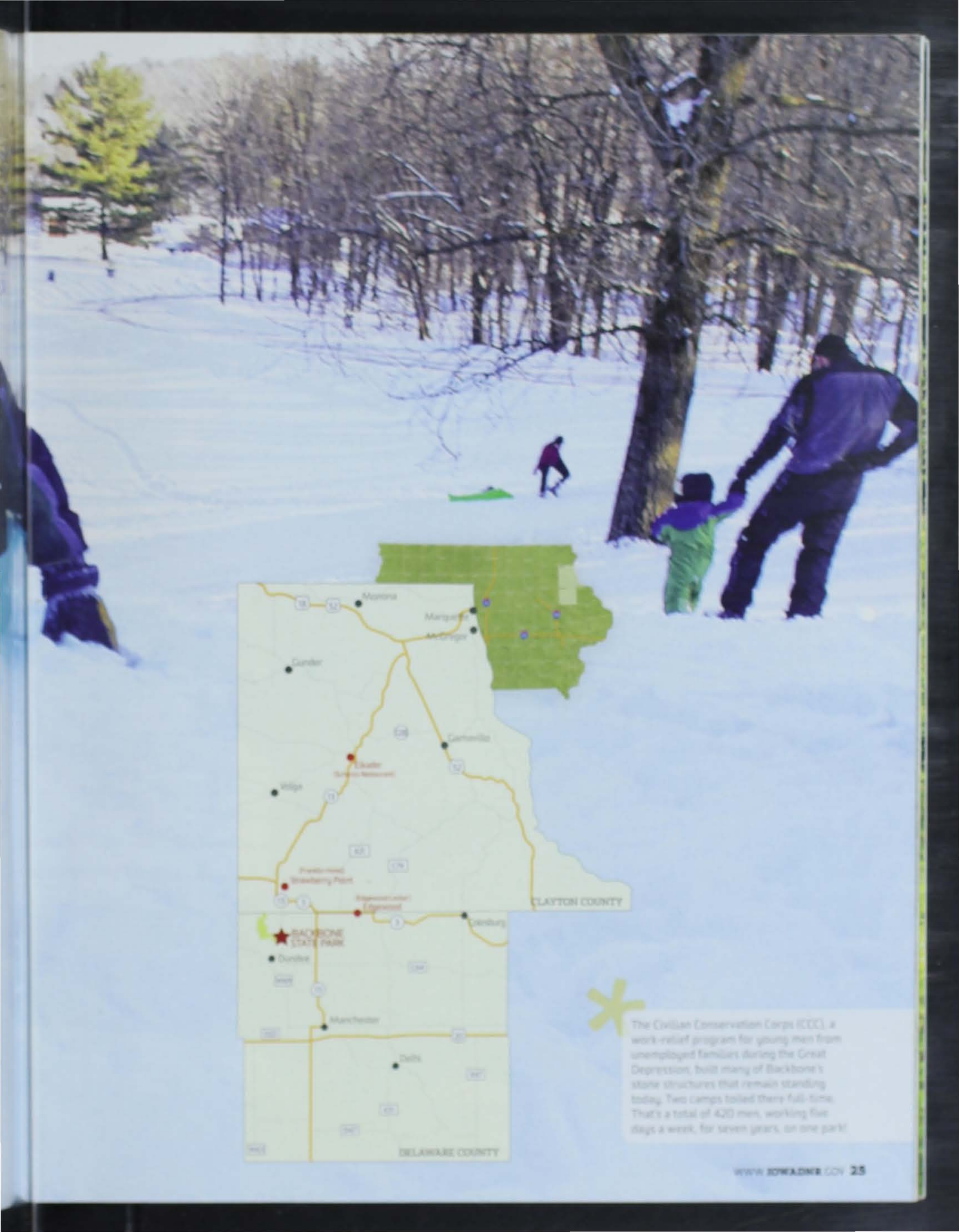
Mike is right. Iowans tend to pull down the shades once the weather turns chill, but those willing to venture out during January and February will experience parks that feel like private playgrounds. Kids can run free in open spaces and wooded places. If you've ever spent winter



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

Lost In Iowa





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

Lost In Iowa



indoors with little ones, you know just how important that is.

Dave Sunne knows. He's Backbone's park ranger, and his brood romps through all 2,000 acres in every season.

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

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

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

It's exhilarating, really.

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

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

"You can go to sleep to the sound of owls hooting," says Sunne. "I

do every night."

He says each winter visitor has a different agenda. Some hike and reflect. Some tote a stack of books to their cabin and don't emerge for days. Others bring cross-country skis or snowshoes. Photographers can't get enough of the place.

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

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

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

Action, adventure and drama

Emily suits up to take the kids snowshoeing, first removing the toys inserted in her boots during what was supposed to be naptime.

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

Not far away, the sand dances



At Backbone State Park, brother Sam Hoff, 5, and sister Zadia, 3, explore with snowshoes far from their Des Moines home.

RIGHT: Elliot Donovan, 2, and sister Greta, 5, of Des Moines prepare for fun in the snow. Sam and Greta make a snowfigure.



Lost In Iowa

A photograph of a person wearing a green jacket and a helmet, standing on a wooden bridge or walkway. The bridge has a railing with a lattice pattern. The ground is covered in snow, and there are bare trees in the background. The title "Lost In Iowa" is in the top left corner.

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



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

Snowmobile etiquette

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

Lost In Iowa



Greta, 5, and Emily Donovan hit the hills.

Sidetrip to Morocco

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

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

"When we first moved to Iowa, the dining choices were meat and potatoes or more

meat and potatoes," says Boudouani. "We wanted to break that mold."

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

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

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

helping thousands of Christians and Jews was big news. Abe Lincoln even sent him a pair of dueling pistols.

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

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

Schera's Restaurant, 107 S. Main St., PO Box 726, Elkader. 563-245-1992; www.scheras.com



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



Frederique Bonheur and Brian Bruns of Schera's Restaurant



under the water at the head of Richmond Springs. For thousands of years, this very spot has pumped about 2,000 gallons per minute of 42-degree water from the dolomite limestone, making the surrounding streams cory for trout.

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

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

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

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

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

Mike has wiped out, and Elliot starts down the hill on little snow-suited legs. It's not a particularly big wipeout in sledding terms, unless you're 2 and you've never seen one before.

"Dad! Oh, no! Dad!"

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

All is well again in kid world.

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

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

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

And in Iowa, in winter, it really is.

Travel Notes

BACKBONE STATE PARK Sixteen cabins, \$50-\$100 per day (cabins rent by the week during summer, 1347 129th St., Dundee. 563-924-2527; backbone@dnr.iowa.gov, or www.iowadnr.gov

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

EDGEWOOD LOCKER Full-service meat locker since 1966 (with a second location in Arlington); 563-928-6814; www.edgewoodlocker.com.

HAPPY

K. M. MADDEN, Supt. Fisheries

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IOWA CONSERVATIONIST

FEBRUARY 15, 1942

VOLUME I

Iowa's Trout Policy Pays

Northeast Iowa
Streams Support
Heavy Population

By E. B. SPEAKER
Superintendent of Fisheries

Brook, or speckled trout have been native to the streams of northeast Iowa since the earliest records of man. Other species now common there have been introduced by State and Federal fish hatcheries, and the native brook trout have given way to rainbow and brown trout because of certain physiological changes in the streams. These changes occurred with the removal of the forest cover and intensive agricultural practices, which caused severe flood conditions and grossly increased soil erosion. They have been cultured in

Trout Culture From "Cradl Guarantees Regal Sport for

Devil's Backbone Cradles Future Creelsful



FEBRUARY, 1972



conservationist



Launched Feb. 15, 1942 in the dark early years of WWII, the *Iowa Conservationist* magazine was born.

It began as an 8-page black and white monthly, featuring a logo by a young Des Moines artist, Maynard Reece. The state received a flood of requests for this publication. But the publication's original roots extend even deeper, back to 1939 with a sporadic, typed newsletter called *Outdoor Iowa*.

This current issue is volume 75, and the beginning of our 75th year. Over the years, the magazine has seen many transformations, advances in photography and publishing technology and of course, evolving issues and

attitudes of the times. The agency itself also changed, beginning as the Iowa Conservation Commission, then the DNR in 1986 after a merger with the former Department of Water, Air and Waste Management, the Geological Survey Bureau and the Energy Policy Council.

Reviewing decades of historical back issues, it is striking how some concerns remain pertinent today, such as erosion, carp populations, habitat loss, lake restoration and water quality issues. Other issues have vanished—the insecticide DDT, acid rain and junked cars thrown into rivers. Industrial and municipal sewage and emissions are now controlled, as are tailpipes. But, at times, once-touted "solutions" to problems of the

Y 75TH

BY BRIAN BUTTON

CONSERVATIONIST

THE IOWA NATURAL RESOURCES



IOWA OUTDOORS

THE DNR'S MAGAZINE OF CONSERVATION AND RECREATION



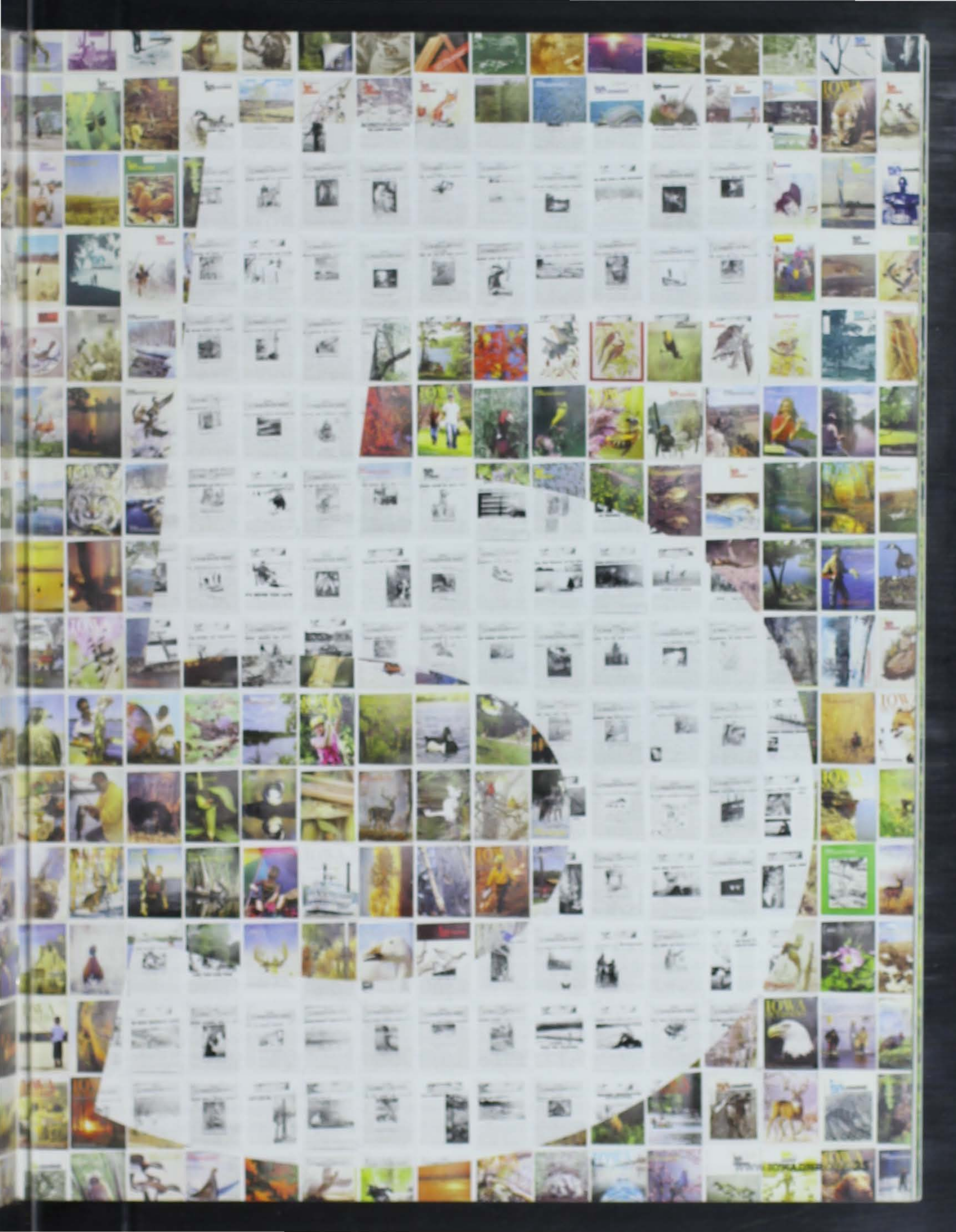
day led to unintended consequences to become new problems, such as the invasive species multiflora rose, once promoted as wildlife cover, to name one. But the eventual recognition of those early, failed attempts, plus the successes, all point to advancing science and human knowledge over the span of seven decades.

When reviewing historical issues, perhaps most striking are the war years. Articles from this era illustrate how critical natural resources were, even in surprising ways. In May 1942, Iowa—the leading button producing state—saw a boom in use of Mississippi River mussel shells to stamp out “pearl buttons” for military uniforms. The resource was needed and the magazine published

concerns about overharvest, siltation and water pollution that affected mussel populations. The war impact on the ability of readers to find hunting and fishing gear was felt too, as so much raw matériel was diverted to the fronts (see sidebar). Motor boaters had to go to their local “war price and rationing board” and apply for non-highway gas rations. “It is not necessary to be ‘continually on the go’ to enjoy your boat,” said the magazine, urging restraint. Even “The Hawkeye No. 2,” Iowa’s famous train car built in 1913 to haul game fish to stocking points across the state, was melted down for war steel. Also, in 1945, a new pesticide, DDT, emerged—the beginning of the end for many species, nearly eradicating bald eagles, osprey and

MISSISSIPPI RIVER





BELOW: At the height of the Iraq war, volunteers from "Iowa's Bravest" help box up thousands of donated magazines as part of an Easter shipment of goodies for the 133rd Iowa Army National Guard overseas.



Sporting Goods Still Short

Seven months after the victory against Japan and 10 months after the fall of Hitler, fishing tackle and hunting gear are still in short supply—from the March 1946 issue.

"Those who expected to find the sporting goods stores loaded with all the gadgets not available during the war years, are doomed to some disappointment.

"Very little new merchandise has reached the retailer's shelves as yet. Reels, both fly and bait, of good quality, remain in tight supply. Steel rods, those new ones lighter than bamboo and more durable, promised to us in the postwar years, are hardly more than on the drawing boards. Lines are in fair supply, with lots of nylon coming up later on. Many artificial lures embodying the plastics, will be

on the shelves in 60 to 90 days.

"In the gun department, it is much the same. Some .22 caliber rifles are coming through from the manufacturer, but the better grade of shotguns are not yet in production. Shotgun shells, bugaboo of the war years, are still not plentiful, due to the critical lead situation. We are a nation definitely short of lead, and will have to import this important metal.

"Outboard motors are not available in all models. Some of the makers are fully converted to peace time production, but quantities are limited, not because of a shortage in aluminum, but because of shortages of other parts.

"Patience will prove to be a virtue if you have your heart set on some of the new things."



peregrine falcons (By 1963, only 487 nesting pairs of bald eagles remained nationally).

Successes were made, too. A 1949 magazine article featured beaver populations and the first season since 1874, thanks to rebounded numbers. In 1965, wild turkeys were reintroduced to Iowa at Yellow River State Forest in Allamakee County. Once abundant, the species largely vanished in Iowa after the Civil War, with the final few last reported in 1910. In 1935, just 73 magnificent trumpeter swans remained nationally, headed for certain extinction. As North America's largest waterfowl, showcasing an 8-foot wingspan, today more than 46,000 exist, including some nesting in Iowa.

It is hard to imagine for middle-aged and younger Iowans, but whitetailed deer weren't always around. The state's first modern-era deer hunt occurred during

five December days in 1953. The magazine was there to highlight readers' mixed emotions to the first deer hunt since at least 1898, when deer were virtually non-existent in Iowa after years of exploitation by settlers.

Those opposing the hunt feared the state's newly returned population would again be wiped out. The herd was estimated at 13,000 and growing rapidly. Those supporting the hunt relished the chance to hunt big game in Iowa versus the most popular quarry—pheasant, rabbit and squirrel—the perennial "big three" of the era. That first year, 3,057 deer were harvested. (The 2014 harvest was 101,543.)

And here is a tidbit from the July 1967 issue: Clear Lake's population of walleye 12 inches and greater ranged from 8,713 to 18,400 fish. We asked the highly successful DNR fisheries staff for an update. The current population is 46,133. Proof again, the mythical good 'ol days of fishing are now!

War-Weary and Dreaming of a Park— "It's a Long Way to Eldora"

From the August 1945 magazine, a long-distance camping reservation.

"Roy Chastain, conservation officer in charge of Pine Lake State Park, recently received a letter from H. W. Johnson, a marine stationed in Kyushu, Japan, requesting a lengthy cabin reservation at the park with the explanation, 'I am contemplating a discharge from the service. I am looking forward to a continuous civilian career. Before I start on this career, however, I would like a month or thereabouts of so-called peace—civilian style.'"

We've also had stories over the last decade of today's returning service members relaxing, healing and getting reconnected and grounded after time in Iraq and Afghanistan. In fact, many thousands of free magazines were sent to Iowa units stationed in those war zones during the heights of the conflicts.



LEFT: Record camping numbers created issues during a boom time for park usage in 1964. Overflow camping areas were rotated to allow grass to recover. Notice what appears to be an old milk delivery van converted into a camper and the spare tire—hanging an inch above the ground—on the front bumper of an International Scout. ABOVE: An unexplained photo found in the magazine archives, presumably some staff having fun with a tame deer in a posed photo? ■

In the 1970s, the magazine followed progress after Congress passed the Endangered Species Act, the Clean Air Act and the Clean Water Act as the public demanded action to repair the nation's badly degraded land, water and skies.

In 1972, Iowa stocked coho salmon in West Okoboji as an experiment. In 1977, the Bottle Bill passed to help remove 20 to 40 percent of all litter—cans and bottles. In 1977, brook trout stocking began. In 1974, the magazine changed from black and white to full color.

Of course it is impossible to convey in a few pages all the significant changes since 1942, nor describe today's issues facing natural resources, so look for more in the July/August 2016 issue when the DNR celebrates its 30th anniversary.

But by far the largest change to the magazine itself came in 2007, with a revamped, re-energized and retitled magazine—Iowa Outdoors. It took nearly two years of

detailed planning, research and input from Iowans to help create the new publication.

We put more emphasis on storytelling, using more impactful photos and taking readers to new places. We learned Iowans want to get outdoors, value public lands and want to know how to help. Our readers want to be inspired, informed and go afield, so to speak, with stories of our staff at work in the field. We also partnered with Iowa Public Television to launch a popular companion television show. Much of the magazine makeover was to tackle a new modern reality—concerns about a lessened connection of people to the outdoors—a so-called nature deficit disorder—thanks to online entertainment and other of life's demands. And after three-quarters of a century, the magazine still remains popular as ever, thanks to you. ■

A photograph of a winter forest landscape. The ground is covered in a layer of snow, with some bare, light-colored branches and rocks visible. Several evergreen trees, including tall, slender balsam firs and shorter, bushier spruces, are scattered throughout the scene. The trees are dark green, contrasting with the white snow. The sky is a pale, overcast blue. The overall atmosphere is quiet and serene.

Evergreen Heart

A New Year's Journey into Iowa's Northwoods

STORY AND PHOTOS BY BRIAN GIBBS

It's 8 a.m., New Year's Day and I'm already thirsty for adventure; some type of colorful excursion to overcome the gray doldrums a long Iowa winter brings. I drag my weary body out of bed, put on the winter gear and head to the quaint little river town of Bluffton to get a taste of Iowa's version of the Northwoods.

My destination is perched on 450 million-year-old rocks and nearly 150 feet above the Upper Iowa River. Bluffton Fir Stand State Preserve protects the largest stand of native balsam fir trees in Iowa. Shaped like an oversize boomerang, the preserve hugs the Upper Iowa

River where a variety of forest communities thrive. Several other species of evergreens live in the preserve, including eastern white pine and Canada yew, but it's those sleek, conical balsam firs that steal the show in this landscape.

In its native range, balsam fir is common in Canada and the forests of the northeastern United States. In Iowa, the trees live only in the far northeast corner of the state, restricted to rugged, steep sheltered slopes found in Howard, Winneshiek, Allamakee and Clayton counties. Balsam fir trees are ice age relics enduring from a time thousands of years ago when much of Iowa was covered in a boreal forest. The trees are best characterized





This nearly 300-acre preserve and its panoramic vistas provide a window to look down into the Upper Iowa and town of Bluffton.

The fuzzy seed head of a recently emerged pasque flower found on one of the hilltop prairies at the preserve.



by their slender trunk, conical crown and incredibly aromatic needles. Most people liken the smell of balsam fir trees to a forest full of oranges. On this crisp winter day, I couldn't think of a more wondrous scent to mark the New Year.

Hiking throughout the preserve's hilly terrain I notice several clusters of paper birch trees. One has a tinder fungus growing on the side of its trunk. This fungus is notable for its ability to hold a flame and is closely related to the same fungus found in the pockets of the legendary, mummified, 4,000-year-old Otzi the Iceman from the mountains of Europe.

My walk down a steep snowy slope quickly turns into an adventurous glissade. I stop at the bottom of the hill to catch my breath and rest against the base of a balsam fir. Dozens of symmetrical whorled branches rise to the top of the tree, eventually tapering into a perfect spire. The canopy of fir trees is extremely dense, creating a mysterious dark forest. Next to me one of the evergreen trees has lost its needles and appears to have succumbed to an insect or drought-related stressor. Eventually, this dead tree will be colonized by beetles and other insects, before becoming excavating holes for a variety of insect-eating birds.

With my ears cupped, I can hear the distinctive call of the red-breasted nuthatch—nasally horns and a “yank, yank.” In the myriad of jade needles, the bird uses its long bill to search for insects in burrows under the bark of balsam firs. A high pitched “seeee” resonates after the nuthatch call. A brown creeper spirals upward on the trunk, using its curved and pointed bill to dig insects from under bark. Several kinglets are hopping around on

Balsam fir trees provide a unique boreal backdrop for prairie plants such as this aster.



the fir branches. Kinglets, little birds known to act a bit like preschoolers, are always chatting and never sitting still. I try my best to get a photo of the skittish tree hoppers but am quickly distracted by the "zipp" coming from a pine siskin. Purple finches join the avian concert and just when I think the show is over, a thrilling encore from a pileated woodpecker echoes through the valley.

From my perch up in the fir stand, I can hear the sound of horses' hooves clanging on pavement floating up from the hamlet of Bluffton. People's voices are mingling next to the wisps of smoke rising from their wood burning stoves, wind chimes are clamoring for spring storms. Another peek through the trees reveals an adult bald eagle flying overhead. Looking further down the preserve, an active eagle nest sits atop an old pine tree.

As I rise to continue my winter wanderings, tiny particles of snow start to fall, drifting aimlessly from the flat fir needles. A small snail is frozen from the roots of a lichen-covered fir. Where snow hasn't accumulated depth, three liver-shaped leaves of hepatica emerge through the needles; other flowers, like snow trilliums, will be on the way soon.

The topmost whorls of pine are illuminated in late afternoon sun; spires of balsam firs grow slender until they peak into ribbons of beauty. In between a swirl of branches there is a window to my soul, and in this space, sunlight reflects into all fibers of my earthly being. Needles of pine, like an ethereal paintbrush, decorate a mosaic of motion in the wind. There is a magic in this forest—a comfort and aliveness brought into the human spirit just by being surrounded by the color green. A slight breeze continues to tickle the white pines; the



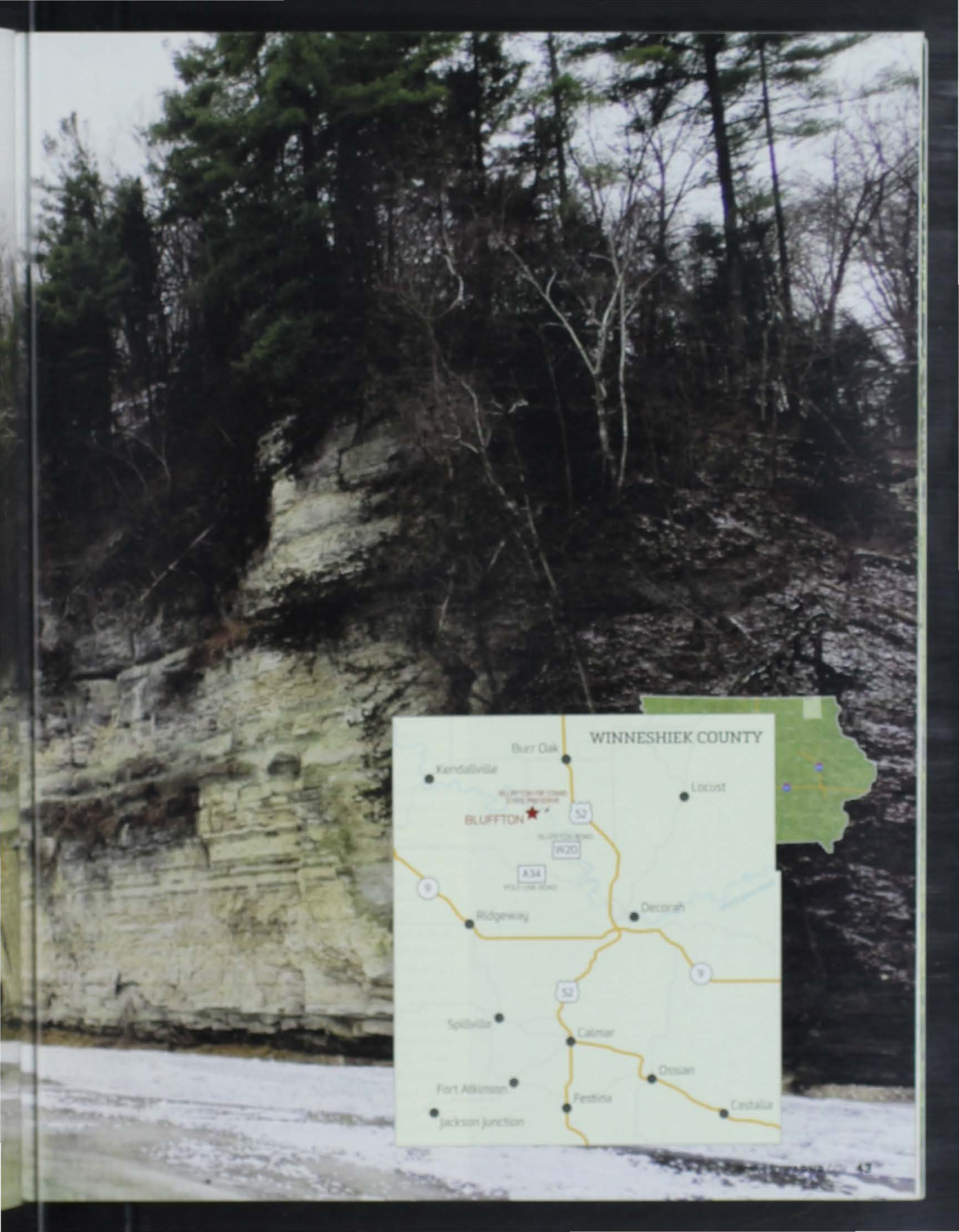
Slender fungus growing on a paper birch tree

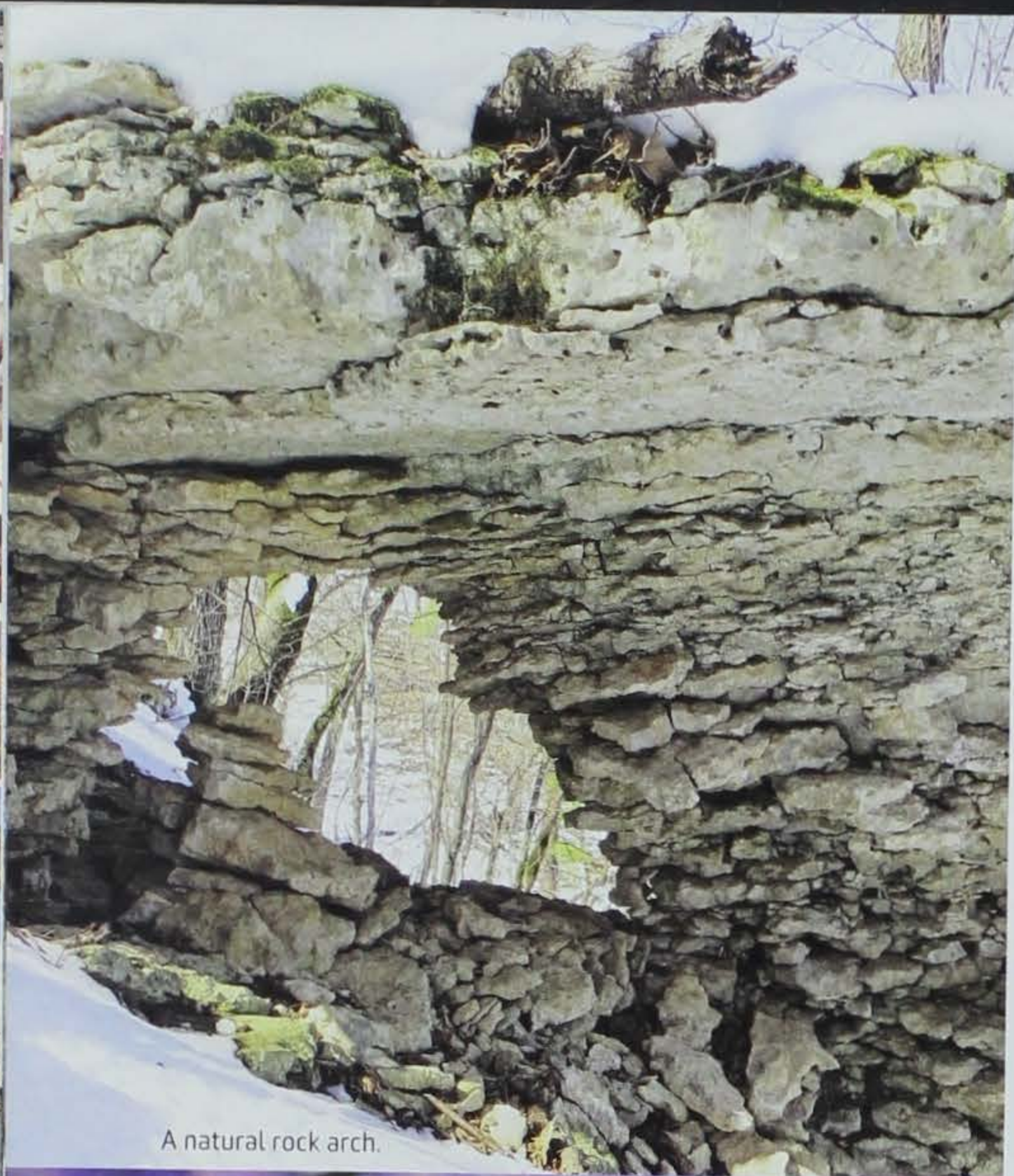
Visitors to the preserve can view a bald eagle nest high up in a tall white pine.



The Upper Iowa River, running along the northern edge of the preserve, is a scenic destination for paddlers in the summer, but few venture up to see the beauty of the evergreens in the winter. The cliffs, palisades and chimney rocks tower more than 100 feet overhead.







A natural rock arch.



A recently sprouted balsam fir tree.



balsam's flat needles remain quiet as snowflakes fall from their branches. Amongst the dieback of lower fir branches, a tiny green twig protrudes new life into this dark forest. There is a constant waltz of light and darkness happening over this valley.

The sun is now fully exposed, lighting half the town of Bluffton while cloaking the north facing preserve in shadows. Miles across the valley, south facing limestone palisades of the Upper Iowa are illuminated in golden sunrays. With hopes to bask in this warm winter light, I head to the top most section of the preserve where, inside a small glade, a prairie grows.

Resting on a postage stamp-sized goat prairie, I experience the ultimate naturalist's paradox: an assortment of sun-loving tallgrass prairie plants growing in the shadows of a patch of cold, shade-loving Canada yews and balsam fir trees.

Looking closely, there are clues left behind as to what this remnant must have looked like last summer. Smooth asters have long lost their purple, yet portray an intricate beauty through their starry seed heads rising above the snow. Wild bergamot and little bluestem grow profusely here, and spent gray goldenrod seeds are scattered on the ground. A stalk of side-oats grama bends toward the sun and I am reminded of the pasque flowers that will be blooming on this hillside in the spring. These prairie plants are just a few of the park's 407 vascular species recorded on just 94 acres of land.

In one of the forest's many nooks, little crystals of snow stick to intricate particles of rocks and moss. The avocado-colored moss is growing on a tree next



to where small pieces of sap have crystalized. Hundreds of years ago, the Ojibwe nation used balsam fir needles for ceremonial sweat baths and balsam gum for cold and antiseptic remedies. I pick one fragment of sap and roll it between my fingers. At first, friction is little, but as the sap warms it begins to stick to my fingers and produces its characteristic orange aroma.

Walking along the edges of a steep hillside, a large mound of rocks—eroded away in the center—looks like a natural arch. Dozens of walking ferns, maiden hair ferns, liverworts and innumerable mosses add color to the cold chalky rocks. These tiny areas are diverse microhabitats that help contribute to the preserve's seven species of liverworts, 37 distinct moss species and 40 lichens.

Within the boundaries of Bluffton Fir Stand, it is difficult to experience such a dramatic contrast of landscapes in Iowa. One moment you're sitting on a clump of moss under an aromatic stand of glacial relic balsam fir trees, the next minute you're resting on a warm goat prairie, gilded in sunshine with charismatic prairie plants growing at your feet. As I continue to ponder the mysteries of this wonderland, the palisades of the Upper Iowa River are ignited orange by a New Year's sunset. My curious mind is a kaleidoscope of green, joyful for the adventurous day spent drifting in Iowa's own Northwoods. For the willing voyager, Balsam Fir Stand State Preserve is a hidden gem that offers a humbling journey into a timeless landscape.

No matter where home is this New Year, spend a few moments under a whispering pine tree. Never more will your body feel cold or frail, but instead you will be graced by the murmurs of your own jolly, evergreen heart. 🌲



Saw what owls may call the evergreens of Bluffton home in the winter. Above, looking up one of the preserve's large white-pine trees.

Golden IN SEARCH OF Wings

BY TY SMEDES

Once thought as wanderers from the Rocky Mountains and western states, research shows Iowa's wintering golden eagles travel thousands of miles from the far, far north.

It's a beautiful late January morning in Allamakee County, with clear blue skies and nearly calm winds. We're about to leave Yellow River State Forest's Little Paint Campground when three large raptors float over the bluff and into view. We've already counted several bald eagles, but one of these birds seems different. Although it has the chocolate color of a juvenile bald eagle, it has white patches mid-wing and drifts with wings extended in a slight "V."

"It's a golden eagle!" exclaims Jerry Toll, one of my two survey companions and expert raptor identifier. Veronica Mecko, my other companion, quickly agrees, and we log our first golden eagle of the 11th Annual Tri-State Golden Eagle Survey.

And that's the fun part. Most outdoor lovers haven't a clue that northeastern Iowa holds golden eagles from November through March—part of a population in the bluff country of Iowa, Minnesota, Wisconsin and Illinois. But they are here, and Iowans are encouraged to help monitor the population by taking part in the survey, always the third week of January.

The surveys are organized by Scott Mehus, Education Director at the National Eagle Center, in Wabasha, Minn., who started the effort more than a decade ago.

As our survey team cruises another road along the middle of Iowa survey route number 2, we slowly top a bluff and enter another valley where we spot five eagles drifting above the far ridge. Three are bald eagles traveling alone, but the other two have us instantly spellbound.



A Fierce Avian Predator

Goldens feed primarily on rabbit and squirrel, but even go after wild turkey and deer.

Locked in their talons, "sometimes the turkey and golden eagle end up rolling down a hill, and it has been known to take five minutes or more for the eagle to dispatch a turkey," says Scott Mehus, Education Director at the National Eagle Center in Minnesota.

While turkey hunting the 1995 spring season, Terry Haindfield, DNR wildlife biologist, had quite an encounter with an eagle. Haindfield placed one turkey decoy five yards in front of his enclosed blind and set a borrowed foam decoy at seven yards. Around mid-morning, a group of jakes and at least one gobbler answered his calls from about 100 yards, but would not show themselves.

As Haindfield gave them the silent treatment, they exploded in excited turkey chatter. Assuming the males were fighting, he thought nothing of it until he viewed an eagle leaving the scene. Evidently it made an unsuccessful attempt at the turkeys and got a good scolding as it cruised low across the open field.

Haindfield wanted to know how the eagle would respond if he called with his slate call with the decoys visible.

"The eagle reacted, banked less than 10 yards off the ground, laid its wings back and turned toward the decoys. Spying through the blind, I could see the eagle getting bigger and bigger and bigger," Haindfield explained. "Then the eagle smacked the foam decoy, splitting it up the middle and forcing it to the ground."

"With talons clenching the foam body, the eagle peered at the dark blind window, surveyed its 'prey' as if to say 'there's not much meat on this one,' and then flew up in a tree empty handed and looking confused," he recalls. "I'm not sure who was more wide-eyed, the eagle who was fooled by the decoy or me recognizing that this eagle was definitely a golden eagle—not a bald eagle." Haindfield still has the talon-riddled, split decoy as a keepsake. And, yes, he bought his friend a new decoy.

Mehus has observed goldens attacking deer a few times. It's usually juveniles yet to learn they can't take prey that large.

"And perhaps they are simply hungrier and thus more daring," he says.

Elkader outdoor writer Larry Stone agrees and says "Several years ago I watched a drama unfold in a nearby field. An immature golden made a number of swooping attacks at several deer. It was obvious the immature golden couldn't dispatch a deer, but nevertheless the young eagle caused confusion and chaos among the frightened deer."



PHOTO: TY SWEDES

Despite their fierceness, golden eagles are quite sedentary. They can sit perched for more than 75 percent of the day. In extremely cold weather they may perch together for warmth. This eagle was photographed in the western United States where a large, year-round population exists. Until recent research, the population that winters in eastern Iowa was once thought to be eagles that ventured from the American West. But the Iowa eagles instead travel thousands of miles from far northern Canada, (shown right).





Golden eagles are the most widespread eagle in the world, with ranges in North America, Europe, Asia and North Africa. Golden eagles in North America are slightly smaller than their Eurasian relatives.

An immature golden eagle is aggressively pursuing an immature bald eagle. Time after time the bald swoops at the golden—talons extended—and time after time he just misses the mark. We gaze in fascination as the aerial confrontation plays out, continuing far down the valley, eventually over the ridge and out of sight.

When I relate this spectacle to Mehus, he explains, "Bald eagles don't go after golden eagles or visa-versa unless they are competing for prey. It's likely the golden had captured a small animal like a squirrel, and the bald eagle was simply trying to steal it away. Predator confrontations over prey often occur, and this was surely such an incident," he says. And it could have been, but for us, the eagles were too distant to see if the golden was indeed clutching prey in its talons.

An Annual Golden Eagle Survey Takes Flight

Interested in wildlife as a youngster, Mehus attended Vermillion College in Ely Minn., and when his professor took the class down to Hawk Ridge near Duluth to view the fall raptor migration, he fell in love with it. After college, he worked for the Minnesota DNR non-game crew, and hearing that southeastern Minnesota and western Wisconsin were reliable places to see golden eagles during winter, Mehus wondered if there were more goldens farther down the river.

"Hawk Ridge averages 150 to 200 golden eagles migrating by each fall, and it never made sense to me they were western birds that simply wandered east. There just weren't any ferruginous hawks, prairie falcons or other western raptors that seemingly got off-course and ended up by Hawk Ridge. We just rarely saw any of these species migrating by. I kept finding more golden eagles up and down the river, which led me to start the golden eagle survey in 2005 with 24 friends," he says.

Lansing resident and biologist Ric Zarwell is an independent bird researcher. Like many, his first encounters with golden eagles "were in the western U.S. as a kid, while on vacation with my parents. Later, I began noticing golden eagles in the driftless area of northeast Iowa during winter. Then, about 10 years ago I got a call from Mehus, asking if I would participate in the first annual golden eagle survey in Allamakee County."

Zarwell's wife, Betty, also participates, and since their first involvement, the couple has participated in a half-dozen more, which are always held the third Saturday in January.

"Sometimes we haven't found any goldens, while the most we have found is four," says Ric Zarwell.

But Mehus still had work to do.

"A lot of doubters thought I was seeing juvenile bald eagles which look similar, so initially I wanted to prove there were more goldens than people thought," says Mehus.

"Since I knew how to correctly identify them, I thought the best thing to do was to assemble a survey group to get out on the same day and look," he says.

Those initial surveys gained the attention of birding clubs and researchers who often doubted the survey numbers. This led to Carroll Henderson of the Minnesota DNR and Mark Martell with the Minnesota Ornithologist's Union asking Mehus to take them scouting for goldens in about 2008.

Get Involved—Become a Golden Eagle Surveyor

Bird researcher Ric Zarwell wants more Iowans to participate in the annual eagle survey, so each of seven survey routes—from Dubuque to the Minnesota border—are well staffed by trained volunteers each year.

"I believe more survey regions could be added if more participants step forward. Northeast Iowa is a beautiful area and the annual survey could even become a family activity. Or, groups of friends could meet and have fun doing the Saturday survey. Surveyors don't have to get up early, since the best times are between 10 a.m. and 3 p.m., after the thermals have started," he says.

Educating people about the importance of goat prairies and other habitat is key, adds Scott Mehus of the National Eagle Center in Minnesota. Area landowners can remove cedars to open hillsides for wildlife and create more prey for goldens.

To learn more about the Golden Eagle Project or to volunteer with the survey, contact golden@nationaleaglecenter.org, visit nationaleaglecenter.org or call 1-877-332-4537.

"When we succeeded in finding goldens, it became a big deal. Afterwards we huddled up at a local restaurant and hatched a plan for the more coordinated survey effort of today, along with the idea of tracking birds back to their natal areas," says Mehus.

Tracking Goldens to northern Canada

It was one thing to consistently find goldens, but it never tackled the speculation as to where the birds came from. Were they, like conventional birding wisdom suspected, wayward western birds? Or did they originate from someplace else? Technology would provide the answers. To track where these wintering goldens originated, the National Eagle Center and Minnesota Audubon, with technical help from Martell, initiated a satellite tracking endeavor. Martell had prior experience with raptor tracking and attaching small backpacks outfitted with tiny transmitters onto birds. Several goldens were captured, laden with backpack transmitters, and their every moves were followed by satellite.

And the findings were surprising indeed. The 100 to 130 goldens that overwinter in the Upper Midwest come from the Canadian far north—the Iowa contingent coming from near Yellowknife in the Northwest Territories. They weren't coming from year-round populations in the American West after all. ■



PHOTO BY ISTOCKPHOTO.COM

Golden Eagle Survey Results 2015

Golden Eagle	137
Bald Eagle	1,773
Red-tailed Hawk	643
Rough-legged Hawk	119
American Kestrel	107

Data includes 55 route areas reporting.
More than 180 observers covered 56
survey areas from Hastings, Minn. to
southern Iowa and across nine counties
in western Wisconsin.

(Data courtesy National Eagle Center)



Golden eagles protect their large home ranges with exaggerated flight displays and posturing. Occasionally, physical contact like interlocked-talon tumbles may take both eagles to the ground.

Getting Slim on a Fatty

BY MARIAH GRIFFITH PHOTOS BY JAKE ZWEIBOHMER



These heavy-duty fat bikes are up for anything you are, including sand, snow, rocks, ice or just your local blacktop. If cold can't slow you down, give a fat bike a try and hold on to your mittens.



It's a perfect winter day. A thin layer of snow is crisp and white, with sunshine to make it sparkle and warm your face. Maybe a few birds and squirrels rustle through the naked tree branches, but otherwise the world is pretty quiet.

In the local park, a young family sleds down a hill. Their bright, puffy coats stick out like flowers against the whiteness. On the other side of the hill, a mountain bike trail cuts back and forth through the trees.

Barreling down the trail, the white of the snow and brown of the tree trunks blur like an impressionistic

painting. Zipping nimbly through the turns, a bike rider laughs as he skids a little. He rounds one turn, about halfway down, and notices a freshly fallen branch blocking the path. The snow is too soft to stop in time. There's nowhere to turn. His mouth drops open in sudden fear and he braces for impact.

Thanks to his tires, it's little more than a bump.

Fitness trends may emphasize everything skinny, but Iowa cyclists say fat bikes can get over that—and just about everything else.

These heavy-duty bikes sport tires near 4 inches wide,

Ride the Together

If you don't want to ride alone, Iowa has a variety of cycling clubs to encourage the sport, and many of them include at least a few fat-bikers. A few examples include the Siouxland Cyclists, Des Moines Cycle Club, Bicyclists of Iowa City, Cedar Valley Cyclists and Decorah Human Powered Trails, among others. While prohibited on most snowmobile trails, some snowmobiling clubs may let fat-bikers use their groomed trails, but be sure to ask permission from the club.

How Bikes Got Fat

Although early bike enthusiasts experimented with large-tired bikes in the early 1900s, one of the first modern fat bikes was designed in 1980 to ride across the desert on prototype Michelin tires.

The cyclist, an Algerian named Jean Naud, originally rode almost 400 miles through desert on a normal bike in 1950. Afterwards, he wanted to try going further on a bike better-suited to the sand. Thus, he contributed to the design of a wide-tired bike which he rode 800 miles from Niger to Algeria in 1980. Naud's most famous ride was actually on an unorthodox wide-tired tricycle, which he rode over 2000 miles across the Sahara Desert in 1984.

About this same time, Alaskan makers started experimenting with designs suited to snow. A 1987 race challenged cyclists to ride the Iditarod trail, typically reserved for snowmobiles and dog sleds, on their various fat bikes. Most of these were individually engineered and relatively odd-looking.

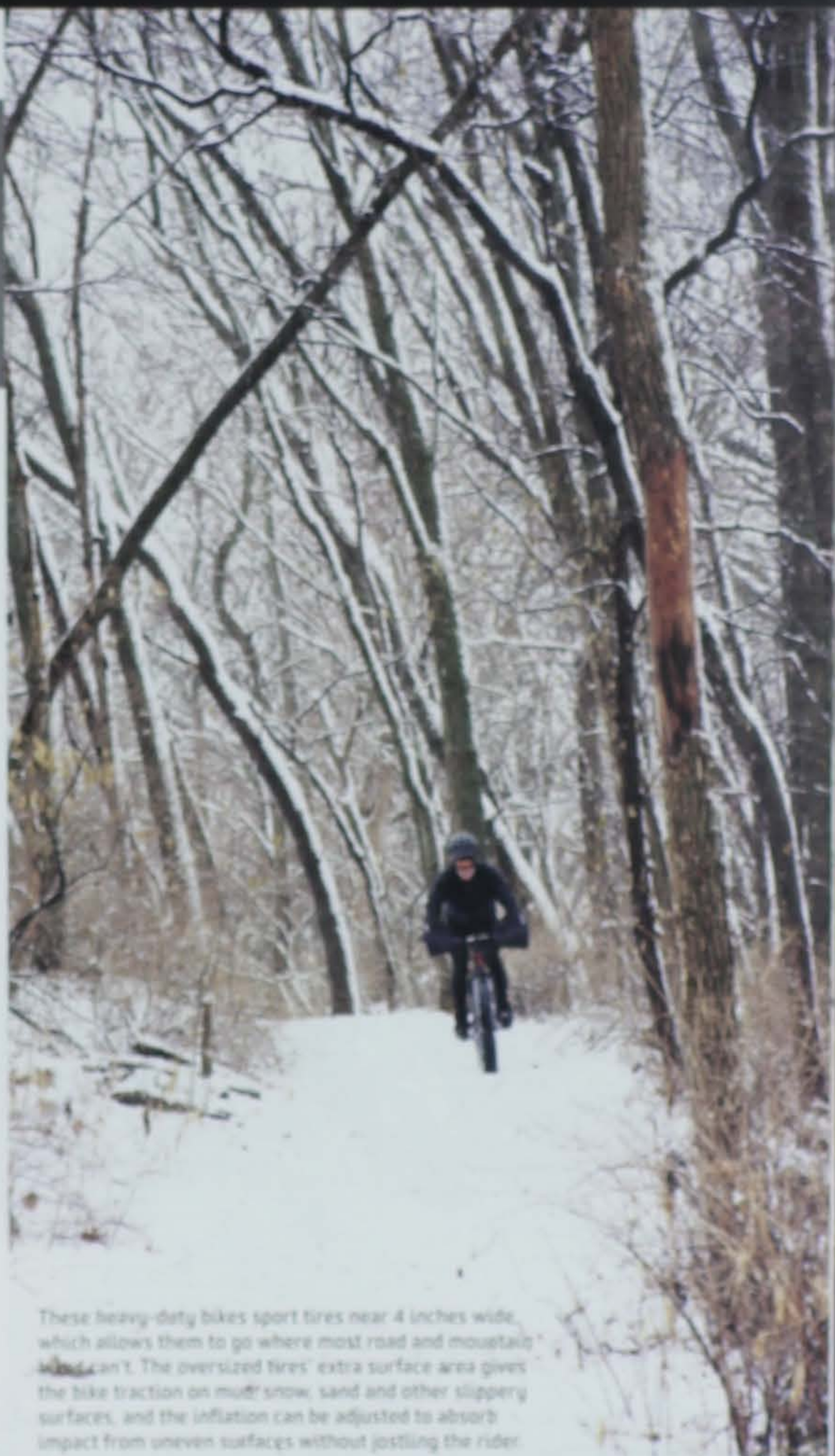
For example, Roger Cowles' experimental fat bike designs replaced the front tire with a ski. Still, his most famous bike was the "six-pack" which floated over snow on two sets of three tires fastened together. By 1989, four cyclists conquered the Iditarod trail on their quasi-fat bikes, including Cowles on his six-pack. Cowles says a few dog-mushers along the trail thought he might be an escaped mental patient.

Fat bikes started gaining more traction in the Midwest around 2005, when Surly released the Pugsley fat bike frame which helped commercialize and mainstream fat bikes.

which allows them to go where most road and mountain bikes can't. The oversized tires' extra surface area gives the bike traction on mud, snow, sand and other slippery surfaces, and the inflation can be adjusted to absorb impact from uneven surfaces without overly jostling the rider.

"You can ride one anywhere, over anything," says Andrea Cohen, manager at World of Bikes in Iowa City. Cohen started riding fat bikes seven years ago, and now she doesn't own a car because her bikes can take her wherever she needs to be.

That's what fat bikes were made for.



These heavy-duty bikes sport tires near 4 inches wide, which allows them to go where most road and mountain bikes can't. The oversized tires' extra surface area gives the bike traction on mud, snow, sand and other slippery surfaces, and the inflation can be adjusted to absorb impact from uneven surfaces without jostling the rider.

Now, multiple shops around Iowa carry a variety of fat bike makes and models. One example is Decorah Bicycles, which carries numerous fat bike brands. Shop owner Travis Greentree says he's loved cycling since he was little.

"As a kid, cycling gave me freedom, independence and fun because I was good at it," Greentree says. "It gave me something to do and kept me out of trouble, and I suppose it still does."

Greentree didn't get into fat biking until the winter of 2013, but now he appreciates the flexibility and opportunity to explore local parks in the dead of winter.



"The great thing is that they make absolutely everything rideable," Greentree says.

That includes multi-use and mountain biking trails in state parks and recreation areas. Groomed and one-way trails in particular are great for a beginning cyclist, and maps are available of most trails online.

Tammy Domonoske, avid fat biker and DNR park manager at McIntosh Woods State Park, says she particularly likes riding in Pilot Knob State Park and Volga River State Park, but cautions that equestrian use and erosion have made some spots on the trails tricky.

Other notable destinations include Mines of Spain and Brushy Creek recreation areas and George Wyth, Backbone, Pikes Peak and Waubonsie state parks.

Jeff O'Gara, wrestling coach at Luther College and

member of Decorah Human Powered Trails, says his cycling friends all used to ride road and mountain bikes. That changed after just one ride.

"We used to just ride regular bikes, and one day a friend of mine brought a Surly Pugsley. He pretty much destroyed us," O'Gara says. "We were sliding all over the place, and he was just riding by laughing."

Although fat bikes are typically weighty, cyclists like O'Gara can invest in carbon-fiber models to cut down on pounds. O'Gara says his current model weighs only 22 pounds, which makes it easier to use on rough stuff like gravel and snow or on paved roads. He says the rough stuff is more fun though.

"A rocky, muddy, sandy trail is great in the summer for a fat bike," O'Gara says. "I always tell people who have

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fat bike races.

The Triple D Winter Race and Poker Tour in Dubuque features two fat bike-eligible events. One is a 65-mile ultramarathon race, and the other is a non-competitive ride where cyclists stop by checkpoints to get playing cards. The cyclist with the best poker hand at the end wins a prize. Those events are scheduled for Jan. 17.

(facebook.com/TriplesDWinterRace/)

The Frozen Fat Fondo Festival will be held in Davenport in early February. The race is held no matter

FAT BIKE ETIQUETTE

1. In natural areas, ride the trails. Respect trail and road closures. Ask land managers for clarification if you are uncertain. Be aware that bikes are not permitted on state wildlife areas.

2. Be sensitive to trail conditions. Wet and muddy trails are vulnerable to rutting, damage and erosion. When soft, consider other riding options. Stay on existing trails and do not create new ones. Don't cut switchbacks. Pack out what you pack in.

3. Yield appropriately. Let other trail users know you are coming.

4. Harassing wildlife is against the law—give them plenty of space.

weather—as their promotions say, rain or shine, snow or slime. The race is a fun and messy three hours, but teams can break it up into relay segments. Even if you don't own a fat bike, you can rent one to participate in this race. (pcfarc.org)

In Decorah, the Fifth Annual Pugsley World Championships is held March 7. This race is approximately 30 miles on varied terrain, and is open to any cyclist using tires at least 3.5 inches wide. (bikedecorah.blogspot.com)

GET INVOLVED

For more information on cycling, fat bike events and cycling in Iowa, visit iowabicycleracing.org, fat-bike.com and bikeiowa.com.

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Burn Some Fat at Fat Bike Races

For those who like competitive fun, Iowa does have a few fat bike races.

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FORESTRY PACKETS



Add beauty, cover, habitat and value to your property with DNR forestry specialty packets. Order each during the months specified; product will arrive for spring planting. All species are hardy Iowa natives (except white spruce) and come from robust Iowa parent stock. All orders provide 50 of each species, plus an extra 50 plants for free—a total of 250 bare-root seedlings. All for the unbeatable price of \$110 (just 44 cents each!) Seedlings are between 8 and 24 inches tall, depending on species.

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DECEMBER PACKET Winter Wonderland

Add visual interest to winter with this custom packet selected for habitat and attractive cold weather benefits. Species include **WHITE PINE** and **WHITE SPRUCE** and shrubs **NINEBARK**, **REDOSIER DOGWOOD** and **GRAY DOGWOOD**. All shrubs yield berries to attract song and game birds, and are especially popular with our signature winter bird—the cardinal.

As Iowa's only native pine and one of just two native conifers, white pine provides great habitat, can soar to 75 foot heights and its seeds provide food for turkey. Pine, along with the pyramidal shaped white spruce, give storybook winter wonderland elegance to your property when green boughs are draped in snow (both trees are popular Christmas trees). They also stop cold north winds. The shrub redosier dogwood is a very fast grower and its bright, vivid red stems add winter color, intensifying as the weather cools. Another fast growing shrub—ninebark—features flaking, peeling bark. Gray dogwoods are tough, low-maintenance shrubs with subtle year-round beauty. White flowers in June brighten the landscape and white berries attract late summer and early fall birds. Its reddish-pink fruit stems persist into winter, adding a nice color contrast to its gray bark.

JANUARY PACKET High Value Hardwoods

True, you may not be around long enough for a timber harvest (although black walnuts may be ready for harvest in 40 years), but land values are greatly improved just by planting and managing these valuable lumber trees. And they add a lot of beauty and vital habitat.

Oaks are Iowa's most important trees for wildlife. **WHITE OAK** lives several centuries, becoming more massive and picturesque with every passing human generation. As the most rot resistant of all oaks, its hard, heavy lumber is used for casks and

barrels and traditional quarter-sawn oak, flooring and cabinets. With red-purple fall foliage, its dried leaves remain on the branches well into winter. Easy-to-grow **RED OAK** has pinkish to reddish leaves when unfolding in the spring. Its warm toned lumber is valued for cabinets. Faster growing than most oaks, its massive columnar trunk rises half its height to its first massive limbs. **BLACK WALNUT** produces not only Iowa's most valuable lumber, it makes our state a worldwide leading producer of this highly valued wood. From cabinetry, flooring, paneling, veneer and gun stocks, its tough, beautiful dark chocolate brown wood is prized. **BLACK CHERRY** is a great food tree for critters and pollinators and yields attractive deep yellow to orange fall colors. Its distinctive scaly bark was the original source of cherry cough medicine. Used for fine furniture and popular for cabinets, paneling, flooring and musical instruments, its wood darkens with age and light exposure. **BUR OAK** has an iconic form with broadly spreading canopy and thick bark. Able to withstand prairie fires, this mighty oak is the classic North American savanna species, described as the tree that "stands resolute for centuries against the elements that devour all lesser trees." It tolerates a wide range of habitats and produces the largest acorns—great for turkey and deer.

FEBRUARY PACKET Edible Landscaping

Create foodscapes with trees and shrubs to not only attract birds and wildlife, but put delicious, fresh and nutritious flavors at your doorstep. Homegrown berries and nuts, harvested at their peak, are impossible to beat for taste and nutrition.

WILD PLUM are small and yield attractive, fragrant white blooms in April before fruiting midsummer. The fruits are good for jams and jellies. It makes great nesting cover for rarer birds such as yellow-breasted chat and Bell's vireo, as well as food for bees and

butterflies, including tiger swallowtail. **SHAGBARK** or **SHELLBARK HICKORY** has beautifully textured bark and yields nuts important to wildlife, and great snacks for people, too. The wood is among the best for smoking meats and makes great firewood. Shagbark does better on upland sites, while shellbark is best on well-drained bottomland soils.

FLAVORFUL ARONIA or **BLACK CHOKEBERRY** berries are a popular health food for their antioxidant and vitamin content. Besides one of Iowa's native superfoods, it yields beautiful red fall color and white springtime flowers. Fast growing **ELDERBERRY SHRUBS** can reach 12-foot heights and produce showy, white flowers in June and yellow fall color. The berries are good for jams and jellies and animals enjoy them, too. About 10 feet high, the **HAZELNUT SHRUB** needs full sun. Its nuts can be eaten raw or roasted. Squirrels, chipmunks, deer, grouse, quail, pheasants and blue jays find the nuts delicious.

How To Order

To take advantage of these offers, call the State Forest Nursery at **1-800-865-2477** between 8 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. or visit iowadnr.gov/nursery.

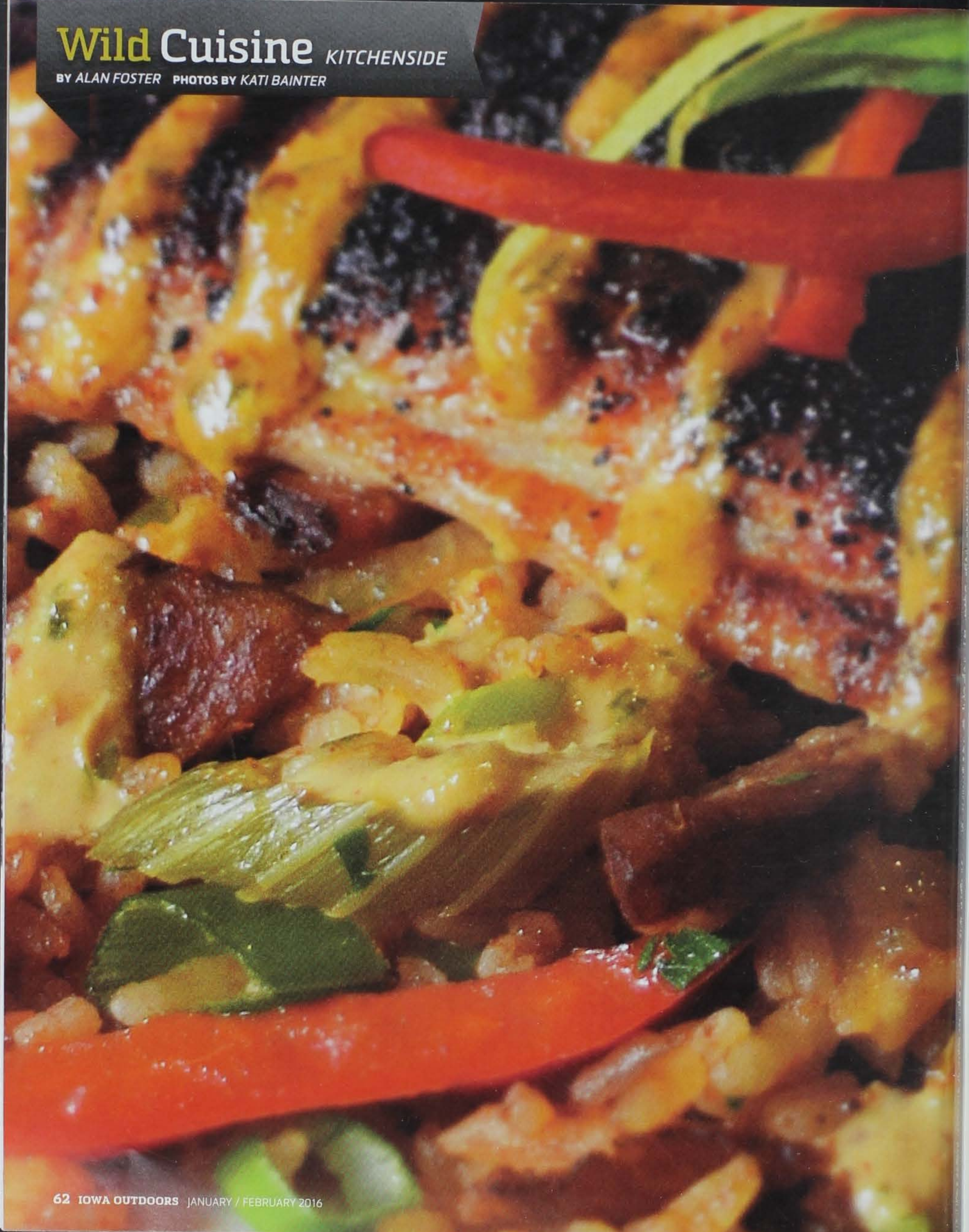
Each month, the State Forest Nursery creates a specialty packet to offer a unique mix of tree and shrub species available that month only.

"We want to help farmers, woodland owners and acreage owners discover the benefits different tree and shrub species offer," says State Forester Paul Tauke. "Whether you want to improve water quality, pheasant habitat or simply enjoy spring flowering trees, our monthly specialty packets can help."

Anyone can purchase seedlings for CRP projects, to increase wildlife habitat, pollinator potential or diversify backyard woodlands. More than 40 species are available from the nursery. Seedling choices, including photos and descriptions, can be seen in the seedling catalog at iowadnr.gov/seedlingcatalog.

Wild Cuisine KITCHENSIDE

BY ALAN FOSTER PHOTOS BY KATI BAINTER



Jambalaya! At Atlas World Grill

There are no shortage of options to grab a refreshing drink in Iowa City, especially downtown where some 30 bars can be easily found in a six-block radius. But if you want a great meal in a relaxing atmosphere—along with that tasty drink—put Atlas World Grill at the top of the list. Owners Jack Piper and Jim Adrian will make sure your dining and drinking experience will be world-class. Piper not only teaches his bartenders how to properly mix, shake and pour, but also each drink's history. But what makes Atlas a "world grill" is the food. Adrian ensures the shrimp voodoo tastes like it came from New Orleans, and the Thai chicken satay salad came from its Indonesian origins. Wash it down with a Cuban mojito, a house specialty, and you are definitely eating and drinking across the world. Adrian got his start at New Orleans' number one rated restaurant, Commander's Palace, the same place that employed chefs like Emeril Lagasse and Paul Prudhomme. Yep, those two. One taste of Adrian's

jambalaya and you will know this recipe is rooted in Louisiana where this Creole dish is king.

JAMBALAYA

6 sausage links
(venison, andouille, kielbasa)
2 tablespoons olive oil
2 tablespoons Creole seasoning
1 teaspoon kosher salt
3 bay leaves
1 red onion, diced
2 green peppers, diced
1 red pepper, diced
4 stalks celery, diced
2 tomatoes, diced
1 tablespoon minced garlic
1 6 ounce can tomato paste
1/2 cup red wine
1 tablespoon Louisiana-style hot sauce
2 cups long grain rice
3 3/4 cup chicken stock
1 tablespoon unsalted butter
1/2 cup chopped green onions

Preheat oven to 350° F. Sauté sausage in olive oil until caramelized, stirring often. Add salt and Creole seasoning, then onions, peppers,

celery and tomatoes and sauté until onions are translucent. Add garlic and cook until caramelized. Add tomato paste and cook until it turns to a dark, brick red, about five minutes. Deglaze pan with wine. Reduce wine until nearly evaporated. Add hot sauce. Add rice and mix. Add chicken broth and bring to a simmer. Cover and place in the oven. Cook 20 to 25 minutes until stock is absorbed. Remove pot and let sit for 10 minutes with lid on. Fold in green onions and butter and serve.

CREOLE SEASONING

3/4 cup paprika
3 tablespoons onion powder
3 tablespoons garlic powder
3 tablespoons dried leaf thyme
3 tablespoons dried leaf oregano
3 tablespoons white pepper
3 tablespoons black pepper
1 1/2 tablespoons cayenne pepper
3/4 cup kosher salt

Combine ingredients and mix well. Can be used in place of salt and pepper to give food a kick.

JAMBALAYA is a Louisiana Creole dish with a Spanish and French influence. While virtually all recipes include the "trinity" of onions, peppers and celery, many differ on choice of protein. It can be either poultry, sausage or seafood, or a combination. But, like chili, jambalaya is highly adaptable to taste. It's a freezer-cleaner dish. Use up the last of the venison sausage or brats, pheasant or wild turkey and fish.

Check out the March/April issue of *Iowa Outdoors* magazine for chef Adrian's spin on blackened catfish with remoulade sauce and apple coleslaw.

Open daily 11 a.m. to 10 p.m.
127 Iowa Ave., Iowa City
319-341-7700; atlasinowcity.com



Warden's Diary

BY ERIKA BILLERBECK

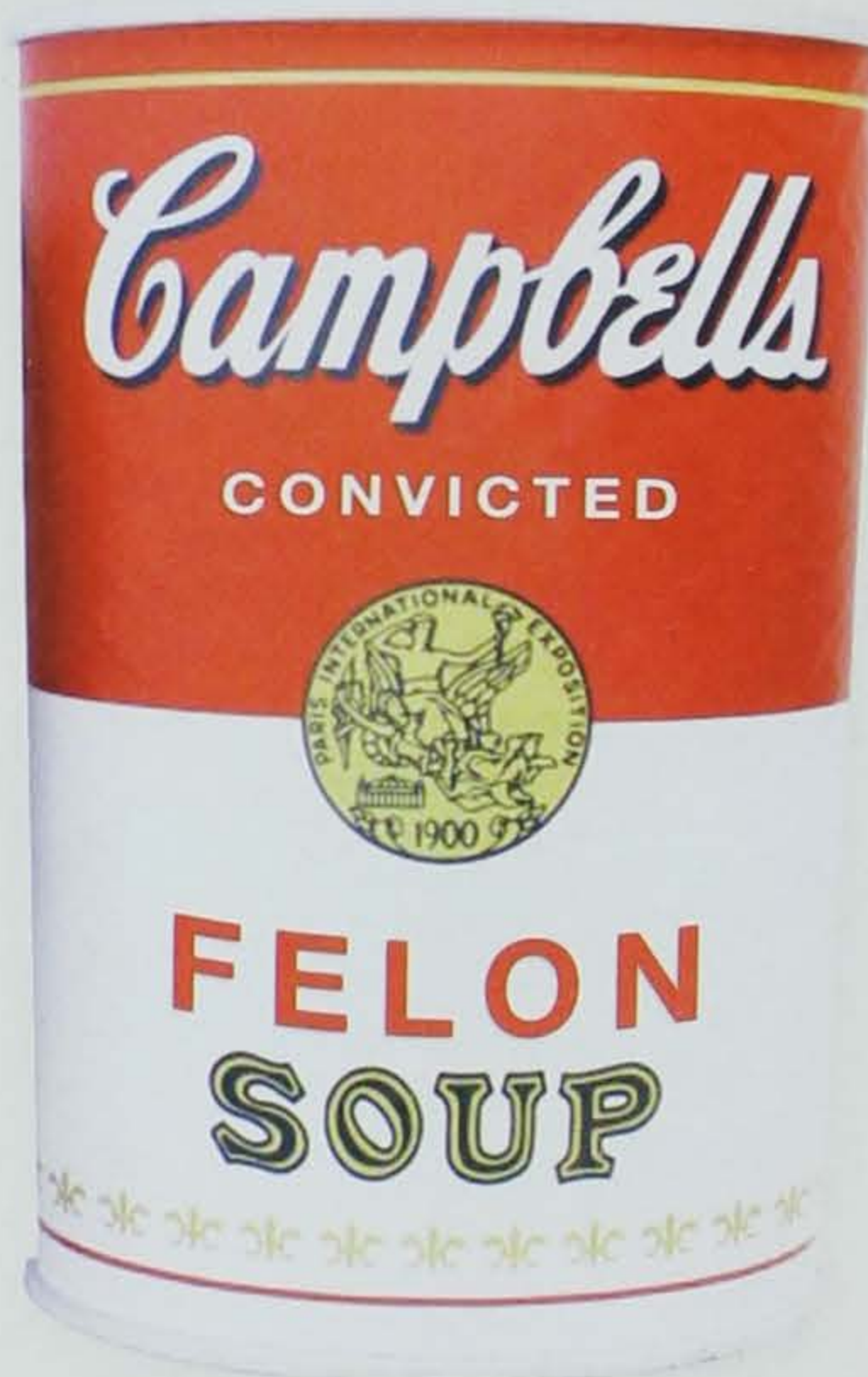


Expiration Date

Almost everything carries an expiration date. I've learned to always check the stamped dates on the bottom of soup cans ever since taking home three cans of chicken noodle that had expired two years previous. Aside from food, there are myriad other things that have expiration dates: hunting licenses, coupons, sunscreen, batteries and pregnancy, to name a few. Then there are the things that never expire: the amount of time you can blame your belly fat on your last baby, and felonies. That's about it. Felonies don't expire. Ever.

When I distractedly answered my phone numerous shotgun deer seasons ago I expected another trespass call. There were already two such calls in the queue, so why not add one more? However, when I heard the quiet voice of the nervous caller on the other end tell me that he wanted to file a complaint about a felon, I decided it best if I stopped trying to multi-task.

The caller, who I will call "Howard," started out slowly. He wasn't sure he was doing the right thing, and said as much several times before finally spilling his guts.



Howard told me he had been surfing his Facebook page and noticed his friend "Tyler's" post about a deer he had shot. Howard told me he believed Tyler was a felon who hunted with a shotgun every year, thereby breaking the law that prohibits felons from being in possession of a firearm. The Facebook post Howard saw depicted Tyler, seated proudly behind a dead buck in a picked cornfield. Howard decided to make the call.

Howard gave me a few details to go on, such as Tyler's full name, a description of his truck, as well as his address. But he didn't have many details about the hunt itself aside from a guess about where the hunt took place...somewhere in the southeast part of my county.

Howard's main concern was that he wanted to remain anonymous. He figured it might

spell big trouble if Tyler found out it was his own friend who dropped the tip. This made things more difficult for me, but I told Howard that I would think of a way to keep his identity a secret. It would have been ideal to stop Tyler on the road and perform a standard license check. But by the time I finished my two trespass cases, and

made my way to the general location of Tyler's hunt, he was nowhere to be found. My only remaining option was to drive to his house.

On my way to Tyler's address, I verified his felony status. His criminal history was less than stellar: burglary, domestic assault, assault on a peace officer, and a note of violent tendencies. Based on Tyler's nasty background, I thought it would be wise to wait for some back-up before approaching him. I may be brave, but I'm not stupid. OK...I'm not all that brave either.

As I approached his address, I noticed an orange pickup matching the description Howard had given. Blood smears dotted the tailgate above the handle. I had the right place.

I parked at the end of the street, watching Tyler's house and waiting for another conservation officer to arrive. I discussed some possibilities to protect Howard's identity and finally came up with a plan.

As I sat there, a minivan pulled into Tyler's driveway. The driver and three passengers got out and went inside. Great—now there were more people to deal with.

It wasn't long before I became distracted and began checking my work email. As I glanced up from my

computer to check the house again, I saw a group of people standing in Tyler's driveway. One of them was holding a shotgun. Based on his driver's license photo, the one holding the gun appeared to be Tyler. The barrel seemed to be pointing directly at my truck. This wasn't a pleasant feeling to put it mildly. I quickly backed my truck out of view.

As I sneaked back into position a little bit later, I saw four men standing in the driveway. A different person was holding the gun and this time it was pointed in a safer direction. It appeared as though he was testing out the scope. He held the gun up to his face then handed it to his friend. His friend looked through the scope then handed it back to Tyler. Tyler was certainly not shy about possessing a firearm in front of his whole neighborhood.

At about the time Tyler and his friends retreated back into his house, two deputies whom I had called after looking down the barrel of the shotgun pulled up next to my truck. I explained the situation to them. Just as I started to tell the deputy that I preferred to wait for another conservation officer to arrive, Tyler and his group came out of his house and got into his friend's minivan. I realized we were done waiting whether I liked it or not.

I drove to the house and approached the minivan before it had a chance to move. I asked the men how their hunt had been. We chatted a bit before I told Tyler I had received a complaint involving his pickup truck. I said his orange truck and plate matched the description.

"I bet it was the neighbors who complained, wasn't it?" Tyler said, irritated. "I left my gun behind before I crossed their fence-line."

The story worked like a charm. Not only did Tyler have a situation that likely could have led to a trespass complaint, but he also admitted to hunting with a gun. Over the next several minutes we discussed everything about his hunt...except for the fact that he was a felon.

When the other conservation officer arrived, we went to the backyard where the buck was hanging. Finally, I asked Tyler about his status as a felon, and whether he knew he could not possess a firearm.

"That was many years ago...doesn't it expire after 7 years?" Tyler asked.

Was this guy serious? Just in case the idea of a never-expiring felony was still a little hazy, we made it as clear as we possibly could, short of stamping the infinity symbol on the bottom of his foot.

As we placed the handcuffs onto Tyler's wrists we told him in no uncertain terms that felonies don't expire...ever. ■



Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos*



MAMMAL MEALS

While fish and carrion are primary meals for bald eagles, golden eagle diets contain a variety of small to medium size mammals such as rabbits, fox and squirrels, with an occasional bird or reptile. In the American west, they also eat marmots, and have been observed preying on larger prey such as young pronghorns and bighorn sheep. They generally do not consume fish.

SPREAD EAGLE

Goldens are more widely distributed than any of Earth's 60 eagle species. Spanning North America from Canada to Mexico (the eagle graces the Mexican flag), goldens range across Europe and Asia and even into North Africa.

HEAVY FLIER

American golden eagles are somewhat smaller than those from Europe and Asia, but one massive female, banded and released in 2006 in Wyoming, is the heaviest wild golden on record at 17 pounds.

DDT-FREE DIET

Unlike bald eagles, goldens escaped DDT contamination as their diet consists of small mammals instead of fish, which were often contaminated with the insecticide. Before it was banned decades ago, this pesticide thinned the eggshells of many birds of prey, but golden eagle numbers were not impacted.

FEATHERED TOOTSIES

The rough-legged hawk, ferruginous hawk and golden eagle are the only raptors in the United States with feathers that extend down the legs to the ankles. A golden eagle's legs are entirely feathered; a bald eagle's lower legs are bare.

GOLDEN BULLET

When aerially diving after prey (called a stoop), bald eagles can reach 100 mph. Goldens dive even faster, easily hitting 150 mph. In a full dive, some sources put goldens at spectacular speeds near 200 mph, placing them as one of the two fastest animals on Earth next to the peregrine falcon.

BROWN-EYED BEAUTY

Adult golden eagles have brown or hazel eyes, occasionally with some flecks of gold. Juvenile golden eagles have dark brown eyes.

LIKE AN OWL PELLET, MINUS THE BONES

Like all raptors, eagles regurgitate a pellet of indigestible portions of their prey approximately 16 to 24 hours after eating. Unlike owls, eagles have powerful stomach acids able to dissolve bones, so an eagle pellet contains just fur or feathers.

EYES WORTH GOLD

An eagle eye has two focal points, or fovea, that allow it to see forward and off to the side at about 45 degrees at the same time. The fovea at 45 degrees is used to view things at long distances. An eagle can see something the size of a rabbit running at one to three miles away.

An eagle eye is similar in size to a human eye. Because their eye is so large relative to their size, it fills much of the skull. Each eyeball is fixed in place by ringlets of bone. As such, eagles cannot move their eyeballs within the socket like humans. But they take advantage of 14 neck vertebrae (twice that of humans) to rotate their heads 210 degrees in one direction, two and a half times farther than humans.



YOUNG AT HEART FOR YHEC

LOREN AND ELLEN ZARUBA, CHARLOTTE

Couple hosts, coaches Clinton County
youth through hunter education

Clinton County youth are honing more than just their shooting skills—they're improving hunting aptitude and learning life skills with the help of a local couple. Loren and Ellen Zaruba have spent more than 20 years mentoring and coaching shooters through hunter education classes and the Youth Hunter Education Challenge (YHEC)—contributing time, funds, expertise and even hosting practices at their home. They teach anyone, from 12-year-olds to a "spry and sharp" octogenarian who attended a recent safety training so he could hunt for the first time.

Through YHEC, experienced community members teach youth between the ages of 12 and 18 hunter safety, species identification, orienteering and shooting. Practices start early spring to prepare teams for an annual competition in June, where youth are tested on knowledge, orienteering and shooting abilities.

Initially there were only a handful of young shooters on the Clinton County team, but that number has swollen to about 30.

"For our first practice last year it was about 5 degrees outside and they were out shooting shotguns in the slushy snow, but not one person complained," says Ellen.

This summer, the team took home a variety of awards from the annual competition. Even so, the Zarubas say they are most impressed with their team for improving their skills.

"The 'C' in YHEC is for challenge, not competition, and the whole idea is to challenge an individual to get better," says Loren. "Yes, they have medals and trophies. However, it's about improving yourself and your skills as a life-long journey."

That journey spans multiple generations. The Zarubas' children and other early YHEC alumni now have children of their own, and some of these kids are enrolled in the program or will be soon.

"Our own oldest granddaughter is 7, so I think about retiring every once and a while, but then I think 'Okay, just five more years to get her started,'" says Loren with a smile.

Leo Mullen says his son Tom's fun YHEC experience may have contributed to an eventual career in soil science. "Shooting is the fun part, but [YHEC members] learn so many useful skills and meet people from around the state," says Mullen. "Without parental involvement and leadership from people like the Zarubas, this opportunity wouldn't exist."

"That's what makes it worthwhile," says Loren, "watching kids improve over the years, and having them say 'thank you!'"

For details about starting a YHEC team, contact the Zarubas at loren_zaruba@hotmail.com or donise.petersen@dnr.iowa.gov or 515-205-8709.

Admiration & Legacy

BY MARIAH GRIFFITH

RAISING RAPTOR RAFTERS

HONEY CREEK RESORT STATE PARK

Volunteers build osprey nesting tower from donated materials.

One of Iowa's most stunning state parks now has prime real estate for a once-extirpated raptor. AmeriCorps naturalist and volunteer Anna Anderson coordinated material collection and construction of an osprey nesting tower in Honey Creek Resort State Park.

As a piscivorous predator (fish eater), ospreys were severely affected by pesticides like DDT in the mid-1900s. Reintroduction and habitat management led to the first osprey nesting attempt in Iowa in 2000. Populations have slowly risen since. Research shows nearly half of all osprey nests are now constructed on man-made structures like telephone poles, tall buildings and artificial nesting sites, so the nesting tower at Honey Creek is expected to be used within the next few years.

"Like most things in nature, it may take a while before there's actually a nest on the tower, but there's a nesting pair nearby so we're hoping their offspring might use it," says Anderson.

The tower was constructed from a platform, metal wraps and braces donated by Lockridge Inc. and a 26-foot utility pole donated by Alliant Energy. For construction, Anderson led a group of Wayne County 4-H volunteers. They Goretska, Morgan Goretska, Devyn Davis, Lance Davis, Claire Carpenter, Tyson Goretska, Chloe Goretska, Riley Davis and club leader Bridget Goretska. By design, the tower is protected from predators and deterioration.

Anderson, excited to see the tower go up, says the project wouldn't have been possible without help from park manager Mike Godby, assistant Glen Hootman and naturalists Hannah Wistamuth and Jacob Ahee. Park staff worked with Anderson in the tower design, and hope the tower will provide both safe nesting for the ospreys and teaching moments for park visitors for years to come.

The nesting tower is standing tall, and "it's not going anywhere," says Anderson with a laugh.

For more information on Honey Creek Resort activities and amenities, visit honeycreekresort.com.





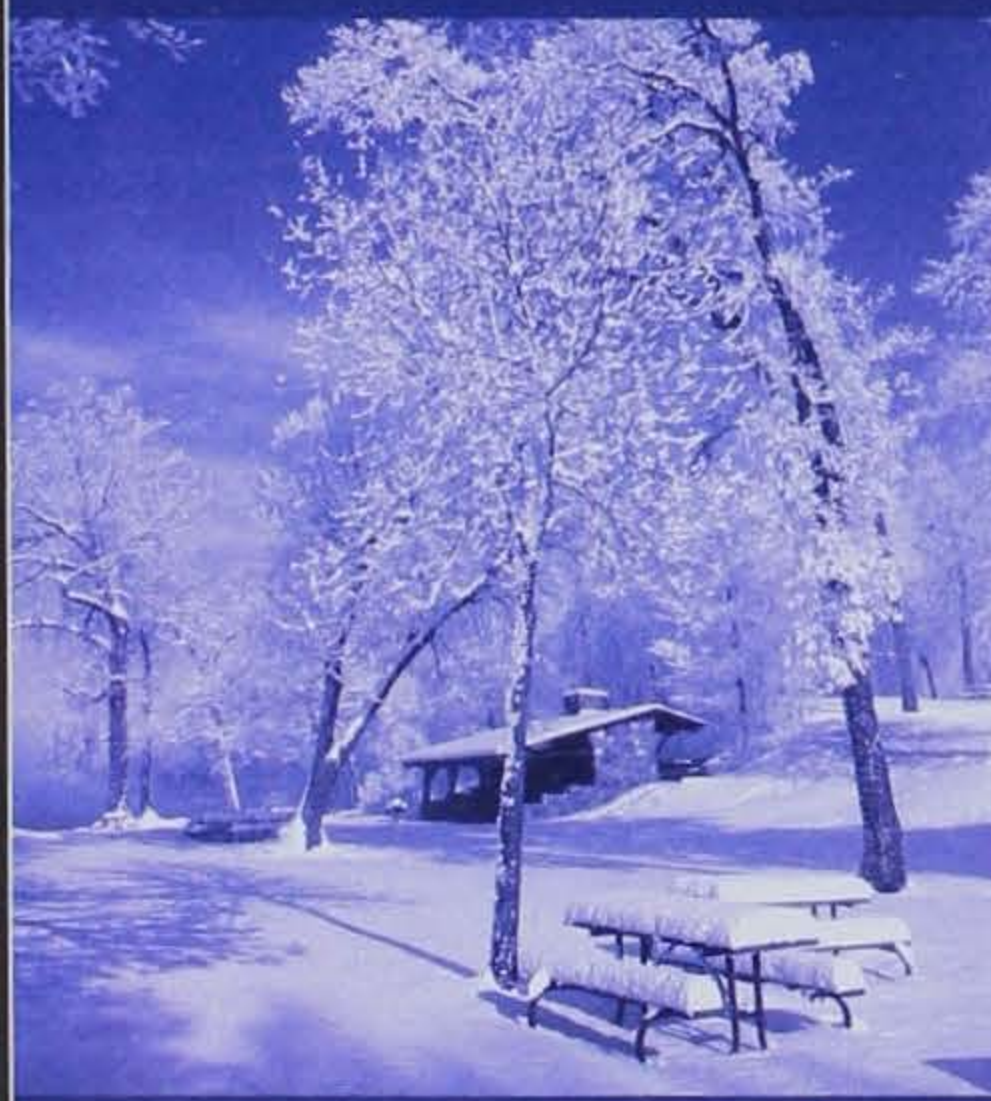
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