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June 2021



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Cover: Prairie-dandelion (*Nothocalais cuspidata*) resembles the much maligned dandelion of yards and gardens but is a native prairie wildflower in Nebraska. This seedhead was silhouetted against a setting sun at Prairie Plains Resource Institute's Gjerloff Prairie in Hamilton County.

CHRIS HELZER

This page: Beads of water from the previous night's rain slowly fall from a leaf in the Pine Ridge. By repelling water, hydrophobic leaves, such as this one, enhance photosynthesis, decrease risk of disease and prevent damage from pollution.

JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKALAND

Nebraskaland magazine

Published by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission since 1926. The Commission is dedicated to the conservation and protection of all the state's natural resources and the people who use them.



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Chelsey Fuhrman, Omaha
A great egret



Connor McClellan, La Vista
White-tailed deer

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Please include your postal address and telephone number. Letters may be condensed and edited. Photographs are also welcome.

BLACK HILLS OVERLOOK

Sunrise over Chadron State Park at Black Hills Overlook Road on Pine Ridge Ranger District of Nebraska National Forest in Dawes County.

JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKALAND



JULIE GEISER, NEBRASKALAND

IT’S A HARD KNOCK LIFE

By Julie Geiser

Last summer during an afternoon walk around a pond, I noticed a huge school of baby largemouth bass swimming along the shoreline, hiding in the aquatic vegetation. Not far away, off in deeper water, was a large, adult male bass, ready to ward off any predators that might threaten his school. It is the last of many jobs he has in the process of raising the next generation of bass.

Each spring, largemouth bass, and plenty of other aquatic species, are instinctively driven to spawn. In preparation, the male bass — from early May to June depending on how fast a particular body of water warms — will clear a bowl-shaped depression on the bottom of a lake or pond by swishing away the sand or mud with his tail and fins. This “nest bowl” typically is formed in 1- to 6-feet of water and can reach a couple of feet in diameter.

After his nest is made, the male tries to attract a female bass that is ready to spawn and convince her to lay eggs in his bowl, swimming next to her in the nest while nipping and butting her belly. If she chooses his nest, the male will fertilize the eggs as the female releases them. Some males attract more than one female to their nest.

It’s the male’s job to tend the nest, protecting the eggs

from predators. During the incubation period, the male will fan the eggs with his tail to move water over them to remove silt. The eggs hatch in 2 to 10 days, depending on water temperatures, and the new hatchlings remain in the bottom of the nest until they are about three-quarters of an inch in length.

While there, the sac fry depend on a yellow yolk-type sac attached to their abdomens for nutrition. Once the yolk sac is used up and the fry are larger, they swim from the nest and start to feed on microscopic plankton. It is at this stage that they become very vulnerable to predation by other fish, including other bass.

As the fry grow into fingerlings, which are 2- to 3-inches in length, they begin to feed on bugs, invertebrates, other smaller fish, even their smaller hatchlings, and whatever else they can fit in their mouths.

The ones that survive are the aggressive fish that will repeat the reproduction process again and again until their time is up. These are the fish anglers love to play on their line, for the sport of a good fight, and the ones I like to observe as I take a walk along the water’s edge, wondering what is going on beneath the surface.

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Northern lights on the surface of an Oglala National Grassland pond in Dawes County. BOB GRIER, NEBRASKALAND

NATURE’S LIGHT SHOW

By Martha Shulski

I had the pleasure of living in the Far North for seven years before calling Nebraska home again. There is much beauty to behold in the subarctic, not the least of which is the northern lights. Magnificent, dynamic and colorful displays that can light up the polar night are called aurora borealis (or aurora australis if you inhabit the southern hemisphere). The aurora is a product of space weather and what happens when solar wind particles are deflected into the earth’s far-reaching upper atmosphere. The geomagnetic poles of our planet are where magnetic field lines come together, both in the north and the south. Think of longitudinal lines that arc far around earth and meet around both polar regions. Aurora typically occur at a distance of 10 to 20 degrees from these geomagnetic poles, which explains why these light displays are common at high latitudes. While rare, the northern lights can be seen in middle latitudes as

well. Geomagnetic storms, or solar storms, can result in displacement of where aurora typically occur and that’s when we should train our eyes skyward. Clear nights, away from light pollution and near the time of a new moon, is the best recipe to view an auroral glow. This light can appear red, green, blue, yellow or pink and is dependent on the type of element — think oxygen and nitrogen — and frequency of its movement. The forms you can expect to see range from a glow on the horizon to patches, arcs, rays and coronas. If you haven’t seen aurora while standing on earth, try from the air during an overnight flight. As a weather person, I find delight in seeing aurora in the comments section of old hand-written monthly weather reports. If I take the time to stop and observe, I always find something interesting.

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ERIC FOWLER, NEBRASKALAND

ELK, PRONGHORN PERMITS UP IN 2021

By Eric Fowler

Elk harvest hit record highs for both bulls and cows in 2020 in Nebraska, and pronghorn harvest was the highest it has been since the 1970s for both bucks and does. Those numbers are expected to increase again this year thanks to a substantial increase in the number of permits authorized by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission for both species.

The agency will issue 225 bull elk permits, a 53 percent increase from 2020, and 621 cow elk permits, a 75 percent increase. For pronghorn, late-season doe tags will be increased in all but two management units, bringing the total doe permits to 1,140, a 52 percent jump.

The increases are in response to concerns raised by landowners in a survey last fall. While the Commission periodically sends scientific surveys to landowners to gauge their thoughts on the deer herd, it was the first time they'd formally asked similar questions to those who have elk and pronghorn on their land.

Nearly 1,500 individuals were surveyed regarding elk. Of the 42 percent who responded: 36 percent, most of them in the North Platte River and Niobrara West management units, said they felt they had too many elk; 46 percent, especially among those in the Hat Creek, North Platte River and Niobrara West units, reported moderate to heavy damage to crops, fences and stack yards; and 50 percent said the damage was unacceptable.

Luke Meduna, big game program manager with the Commission, said to this point biologists around the state regularly had talked with landowners about elk since the species reestablished itself in the state. While a few had expressed concerns, most had wanted to see more elk, and biologists had been conservative with elk management.

"The 'Nebraska nice' thing is real," said Meduna. "For the

most part, while elk herds were slowly expanding through the '90s and early 2000's, landowners were quite quiet. Some would mention it, but by and large, most didn't until there were way too many. Most enjoyed seeing 5 or 10 and even 20

Deer Permits Increasing

Additional deer permits were authorized for 2021, primarily in an effort to target whitetail does and control the herd that has recovered from heavy losses to disease during severe drought in 2012.

Permit quotas have been increased in five units, and in four more units where permits typically don't sell out, the number of bonus antlerless tags has been increased. The River Antlerless season has also been extended through January.

Special permits also have been created for Harlan County Reservoir and the Southwest Reservoirs to allow antlerless harvest on those public lands, something that had been prohibited to prevent overharvest.

- 46,275 Firearm Permits, up 2 percent
- 32,100 Antlerless Permits, up 6.5 percent
- Increased bonus tags in Calamus West, Keya Paha, Plains and Sandhills units
- Increased firearm permits in Blue Northwest, Blue Southeast, Calamus East, Elkhorn and Wahoo units
- Increased Antlerless permits in Blue Northwest, Blue Southeast, Pine Ridge and Wahoo units

elk, but when it became 40 or 50 or more, their tune changed and they spoke up. The number of landowners telling us that we have too many elk has drastically increased in the past few years."

The concern among landowners is highest in areas with row crops interspersed among or adjacent to elk habitat. "The amount of damage they can do in corn is significant," Meduna said.

More and more landowners are doing their part to control the herd by allowing access to more hunters, helping them get an elk and then getting the next hunter in to do the same. In 2020, the number of antlerless elk permits increased by 40 percent from 2019, antlerless harvest went up 84 percent and success jumped 14 points to 59 percent, the highest rate ever. Splitting the antlerless season in two more units to spread out hunting pressure this fall should help maintain the success.

Meduna said biologists will continue to balance landowner needs with hunter success as it adjusts permit numbers in the years to come. The age and trophy quality of bulls harvested continues to increase, and success remains high for this once-in-a-lifetime permit.

The increase in pronghorn doe permits also is in response to landowner concerns. About 1,300 surveys were sent and 500 returned. Of those, 49 percent said there were too many pronghorns, especially in the southern Panhandle, and 72 percent said they experienced some damage, primarily to crops and fencing.

Meduna said the increase in doe permits could bring harvest back to levels not seen since the 1970s, when hunters took home between 300 and 500 each fall, making up roughly half of the harvest. Drought and a number of hard winters in the 1980s reduced the population to the point that only buck tags were issued for many years, even into the first decade of this century.

"We're in the process now of turning that dial back up," Meduna said. "Landowners have told us that what we've been doing hasn't been enough, so we're definitely trying to be responsive to that."

The Commission is also capping the number of nonresident archery pronghorn tags at 250. Sales of this permit, which had been unlimited, ballooned from 133 in 2010 to 543 last year, driven in part by COVID-19 pandemic and also by eastern hunters looking for something new to try. Resident archery tags also increased by 200. Many of the new hunters found their way to public land on the Oglala National Grassland.

"That had an affect not just on the crowding of the hunters, but of hunting success for some of the other permits," said Meduna, noting that the pressure pushed so many pronghorn out of the area that firearm success dropped 17 points to 47 percent. The cap on nonresident permits was the option favored by most pronghorn hunters surveyed by the Commission this winter.

Hunting Elk in a Private Land State

Drawing an elk permit in Nebraska isn't easy: 6,000 people applied for 501 permits in 2020. And with much of their range on private land, finding a place to hunt once you draw a tag isn't easy either. But it is not as difficult as some may lead you to believe, and with the desire of many landowners to reduce the number of elk on their land, it is getting easier.

With an additional 345 permits available for the coming season, odds of drawing will be better but finding a place to hunt could be a challenge. Luke Meduna, big game program manager with the Commission, provides these tips for those lucky enough to draw.

- When you draw a permit, head to your unit as soon as possible and start knocking on doors. Landowners are more apt to grant permission to hunters they meet in person. Do not wait until the season opens to ask.

- Be flexible. Some landowners only grant access for a week or less, allowing them to offer access to more hunters throughout the season. Most reserve the first week or two of the general season for bull hunters. Take what you can get and make the most of it.

For a variety of reasons, cows are more difficult to hunt and harvest than bulls. These are herd animals, there are relatively few of them compared to deer and they are extremely sensitive to pressure. Don't expect your hunt to be anything like a late-season white-tailed doe hunt.

- Take any advice the landowner gives you. They know the habits of elk on their property best.

- While few elk are harvested on public land, Meduna thinks that is primarily due to lack of effort. If you don't find elk one day, they could be there the next. Four trophy bulls came from public land or Open Fields and Waters land in 2020.

- You don't have to pay for access. A University of Nebraska-Lincoln study surveyed hunters who had elk permits between 2011 and 2016 found 58 percent of bull hunters and 19 percent of cow hunters paid for access. Landowners managing for elk are more likely to charge, especially for bulls, but success tends to be higher.

- Give yourself time. The same UNL study found antlerless elk hunters spent an average of 7 days in the field, bull hunters 6.4 days.

- Be respectful of landowners and thank them for the opportunity, whether you were successful or not.

- Contact the Game and Parks office in your unit. Biologists may be able to point you in the direction of landowners who allow hunting.



JENNY NGUYEN-WHEATLEY, NEBRASKALAND

BUTTER AND BASIL SAUGER WITH ORZO SALAD

By Jenny Nguyen-Wheatley

Servings: 4
Prep Time: 5 minutes
Cooking Time: 30 minutes
Ingredients:

- 4 to 8 sauger/walleye fillets
- Kosher salt and freshly cracked pepper, to taste
- 5 tablespoons of salted butter, separated
- 4 slices of lemon
- 2 tablespoons of freshly chopped basil, separated
- ½ pound of uncooked orzo
- 2 tablespoons of extra virgin olive oil
- 1 tablespoon of lemon juice
- ¼ teaspoon of dried oregano

• Small handful of cherry/grape tomatoes, sliced

• 1 tablespoon of grated Parmesan cheese

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees Fahrenheit. Pat fish fillets dry with paper towels and lay them on a rimmed cookie sheet lined with a large sheet of foil — large enough to fold over and seal into a packet. Sprinkle salt and pepper on one side of the fish. Distribute lemon slices, 1 tablespoon of freshly chopped basil and 4 tablespoons of butter on top. Fold over the foil to seal and bake for 20 minutes.

2. Meanwhile, bring a pot of salted water to a boil and cook ½ pound of orzo according to package directions. When orzo is al dente, drain it.

3. Immediately transfer hot orzo to a mixing bowl. Stir in olive oil and 1 tablespoon of butter while it's still warm.

Next, stir in 1 tablespoon of freshly chopped basil, lemon juice, tomatoes, oregano, salt and pepper to taste; start with ½ teaspoon of salt and adjust from there. Stir in Parmesan cheese right before serving.

4. Serve baked fish with warm or room temperature orzo salad on the side.

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Victoria Springs State Recreation Area

An Oasis at the Edge of the Sandhills

Story and photos by Eric Fowler

When Victoria Springs State Recreation opened in August 1925, an estimated 4,500 people attended the celebration. These days, around 6,000 people visit in an entire year. It's a quiet little park, which is exactly why those who visit do so.

Some folks will say the 60-acre park is in the middle of nowhere. But that isn't true. It's only 6 miles off the beaten path of Nebraska Highway 2 if you head west from Anselmo.

Others have called it "an oasis in the Sandhills," but that's not entirely true, either. The park sits in a narrow valley alongside Victoria Creek at the southeastern edge of the Sandhills, which you will soon find if you drive north or west. To the south and east are the rugged central loess hills.

But the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission's second-oldest park is indeed an oasis. Here you can fish or take a paddleboat ride around the picturesque 5-acre spring-fed pond, have lunch in the picnic area shaded by towering cottonwoods, take a walk

through a prairie, and spend a night in the campground or one of two rustic cabins, which just received a facelift.

The area has a rich history. Charles Mathews, one of the first settlers in Custer County, staked his claim along Victoria Creek in 1874. He built two cabins there, one his home and the other the county's first post office. That was the beginning of the town of New Helena, where Mathews' home would later become the first general store. Those cabins stand today, as does the District No. 2 schoolhouse, completed in 1889 and used until 1964.

Mathews and his partners also founded the Victoria Springs Mineral Co., bottling and selling the mineral water nationwide for its therapeutic value. The latter wasn't entirely true, either, as science would explain, and the area never became the health resort some envisioned.

But there is indeed therapeutic value in Victoria Springs SRA. For some, peace, quiet and solitude are indeed the elixir of life. [N](#)



ABOVE: The sun rises over the spring-fed pond that is the centerpiece of Victoria Springs State Recreation Area.

RIGHT: Chris Schaffert of Aurora pushes his granddaughter, Nora Rousch, on a swing in the playground at Victoria Springs.





TOP LEFT: Two log cabins built by Judge R. Charles Mathews in 1874, one his home and the other the first post office in Custer County, are now part of Victoria Springs State Recreation Area.

MIDDLE LEFT: The Custer County School District No. 2 was formed in 1876 and built this school in New Helena in 1888-1889. It served students until 1964 and is now part of the SRA.

BOTTOM LEFT: The Riessland and Kucera families of Pleasanton relax around a fire in the campground at Victoria Springs.

TOP RIGHT: Chris and Teresa Schaffert of Aurora and their grandchildren, Aden and Nora Rousch, ride paddleboats around the pond at Victoria Springs.

BOTTOM RIGHT: An aerial view of Victoria Springs. The boundary to the SRA is a rectangle. The road in the foreground travels east (left side) to west.





Victoria Springs is located 6 miles east of Anselmo. The 60-acre area includes historic buildings, cabins, campsites and a picnic area. Half of the campsites and the two cabins take reservations up to a year in advance. The park will host one of three signature events celebrating 100 years of Nebraska State Parks on July 10. It will feature a vintage baseball game and walking tours of the historic cabins and the namesake springs.



TOP RIGHT: Lights illuminate a cabin on the bank of the pond at Victoria Springs. The park's two cabins were remodeled this spring, with the screened porches enclosed to expand living space, decks added overlooking the pond and a ramp built to make them wheelchair accessible.

BOTTOM LEFT: Ron and Rhonda Kush of Platte Center walk down a trail that winds through the grassland and woodlands on the west edge of the park.

BOTTOM RIGHT: Margy Stoly of Lincoln fishes from the bank near her cabin on the pond.



Outdoor Nebraska

By Renae Blum

As the celebration of the centennial of the state park system continues, make sure to join us for one of the many events taking place across the state. Learn more at Calendar.OutdoorNebraska.gov or pick one of the 78 park destinations to explore on your own. 



Attend Chadron's 100th anniversary party

June 11-12 | Chadron State Park

It all started here. Come celebrate the 100th anniversary of Nebraska's first state park. Activities include a laser light show, paddleboating and kayaking, a car show, stagecoach rides, Dutch-oven demos, a treasure dive at the pool, a canoe regatta race, and archery and pellet gun shooting at the new shooting gallery.

JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKALAND

Fish interstate lakes

Throughout the month
Central Nebraska

Enjoy good fishing at the 40 sandpit lakes along Interstate 80. Almost all have largemouth bass, bluegills, channel catfish and a variety of other species.

Nearly all are open to the public, and they're close enough together that you can fish two or three in a day. Find a guide to fishing this area at OutdoorNebraska.org/wheretofish.

DOUG CARROLL, NEBRASKALAND



Attend "100 Year Extravaganza" event

June 5 | Enders State Recreation Area

This event offers plenty to do, from a barbecue smoke-off to kayaking, live music, a trick shooting demonstration, 5-K run and car show.

JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKALAND

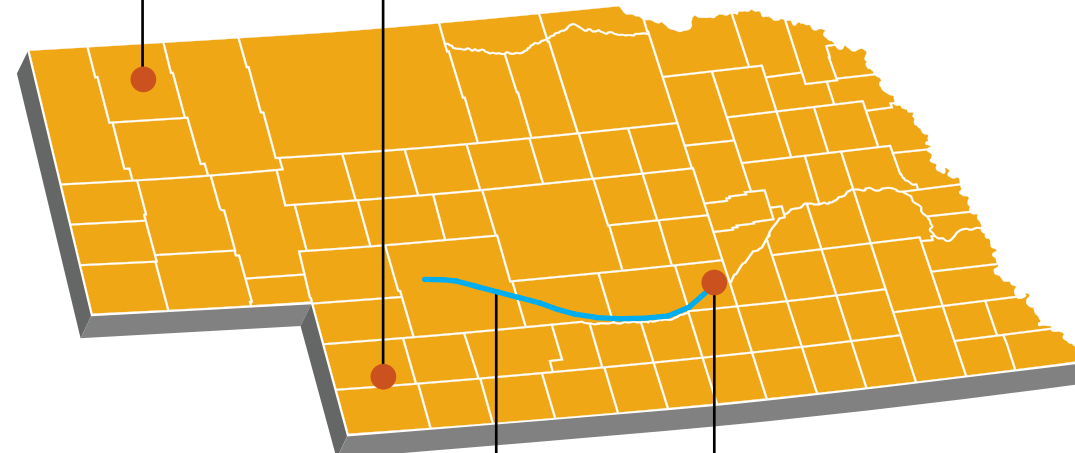
What To Do in June



Participate in the Great Park Pursuit

Through September | Statewide

Get out and explore Nebraska's wide array of parks with this free program. Teams can visit up to 20 official sites, where you'll follow clues and search for a special pole within each park. This year's program has a fishing focus and highlights the Nebraska state park centennial. JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKALAND



Participate in Family Fun Day

June 12 | Mormon Island State Recreation Area

Spend a day at Mormon Island enjoying an outdoor scavenger hunt, fishing, kayaking, camping games, archery, tomahawk throwing, Dutch-oven cooking and animal identification.

JENNY NGUYEN-WHEATLEY, NEBRASKALAND



Continuing the Hunt

By Todd Mills

How to Pursue Your Passion as You Age

Nothing drives a human being like pursuing a passion. And when it comes to hunting, well, some will do most anything to bag a bird or that trophy buck. But what happens when your physical capabilities limit or even stop you from chasing that long-time dream of hunting when you are past retirement? What once was a burning desire to strap on those waders and grab that gun, now gets replaced with “I used to hunt, but my body just can’t take it anymore.”

It’s hard work to hunt and fish. Two months of running and gunning for turkeys is not easy on the body, and if you don’t take care of yourself, those two months turn into two weekends, which turns into two mornings, which turns into one opening day hunt. And after that,

it dies with your stories of “remember the time when we ...”

Old Father Time has a way of catching up faster than we’d like. But trust me, getting older doesn’t mean you have to quit hunting. If you do a little maintenance on your body, just like cleaning your hunting and fishing gear, you’ll be clawing your way out of the grave when the good Lord finally comes with that year’s permit still in hand.

Starting an exercise program is not easy, that’s for sure, and finding the right combination of exercises can be even tougher, especially ones that benefit the hunter. Here is a great place to start, right after you’ve gotten a physical from your doctor.

Elwood Vick hunts
bobwhite quail in
Lancaster County.

JEFF KURRUS, NEBRASKALAND

Upland Hunting

Several years ago, I spent opening weekend in Iowa hunting pheasants in knee-high grass. Although I was in good cardio condition, I was not ready physically to handle “knee ups” all day long. The next day, I paid for it.

The following are three options to help condition yourself to the rigors of upland hunting.

ERIC FOWLER, NEBRASKALAND

Cardio

Start slowly and allow yourself plenty of time to get in condition. Start with 20 minutes initially and increase up to 45 minutes.

Treadmill – Gradually add incline to simulate walking on uneven ground.

Outside – Walk hills as well as on flat ground two to three times per week.

Upper Body

Resistance training, or strength training, is important to strengthen your arms and shoulders for carrying a gun.

Resistance Bands – Bicep curls and shoulder raises can easily be done with bands.

Dumbbells or Curl Bar – Continue with the bicep curls and shoulder raises. Remember to use enough weight to make it difficult to finish the last couple repetitions.

Two-three sets per exercise with 10-12 reps.

Lower Body

Body Squats – This exercise will help to condition your upper thighs. Use your own weight to start with and eventually you can use a weighted ball or kettlebell. If you have access to a plyometric box, use it to step up and down. Another option would be to go up and down your stairs several times.



ALL EXERCISE PHOTOS – JEFF KURRUS, NEBRASKALAND



Waterfowl Hunting

Nothing taxes the body quite like waterfowl hunting. Walking on uneven terrain, carrying decoys, pushing a boat ... even walking into an underground blind can be challenging. Now throw in waders, a gun, your blind bag and some cold temps. If you're not in physical shape to handle these conditions, you'll fade fast. Believe me, I have seen it happen to my favorite hunters.

Although your cardio program can be similar to the upland program, core strength is probably the most important component to add to your waterfowl conditioning program.

JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKALAND

Cardio

Short Planks – Keep your core tight. Start with 30 seconds and extend time as you're able.

Push-Ups – Start on your knees if you need to. Push-ups will strengthen your upper body and core.

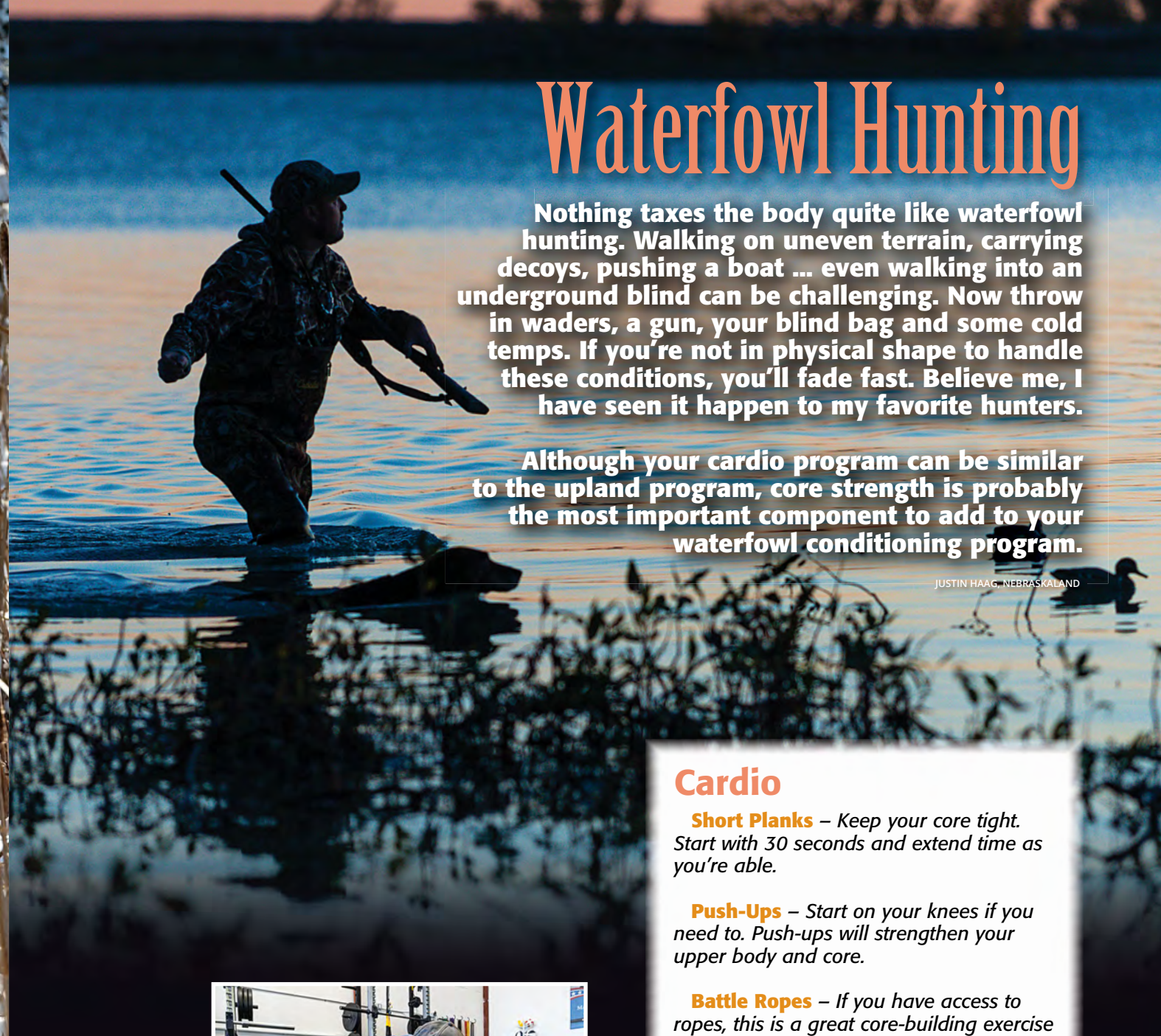
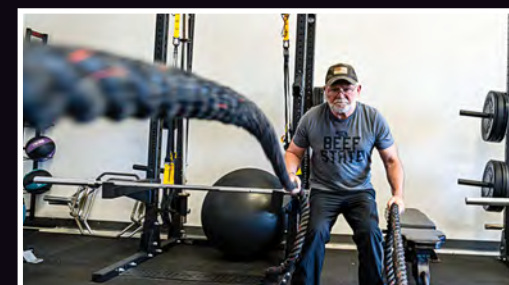
Battle Ropes – If you have access to ropes, this is a great core-building exercise that also combines cardio. Start with 30 seconds and continue to add more time depending on what you can handle.

Upper Body

Resistance Bands – As with upland hunting, bicep curls and shoulder raises are necessary.

Dumbbells – Add flat presses as you gain strength and balance.

Two-three sets per exercise with 10-12 reps.



Deer Hunting

Although I'm not a deer hunter, I've heard plenty of stories from hard-core hunters that deer hunting can be the toughest of all hunting when it comes to physical conditioning. In deer hunting, you use muscles that you don't normally. Walking long distances to your favorite spot and climbing into a stand is one thing, but field dressing and dragging a deer out takes the physical exertion to an entirely different level. JEFF KURRUS, NEBRASKALAND

Cardio

Walk – Strap a backpack on and go for a long walk. Find an area that you can go up and down a slight incline. As your conditioning improves, adjust your pace to a fast walk.

Treadmill – If you have access to a treadmill, you can do the same. Steadily increase your time and distance as your conditioning increases.

Rowing Machine – If you have access, a rowing machine is a great way to acclimate your body to the pulling movement of dragging a deer out or pulling equipment.

Upper Body

Lat Pulldowns – If you have access to a pull-down machine or TRX bands, these are perfect for building upper body strength. Make sure you're using weight that's challenging.

Two-three sets at 12-15 reps.

Lower Body

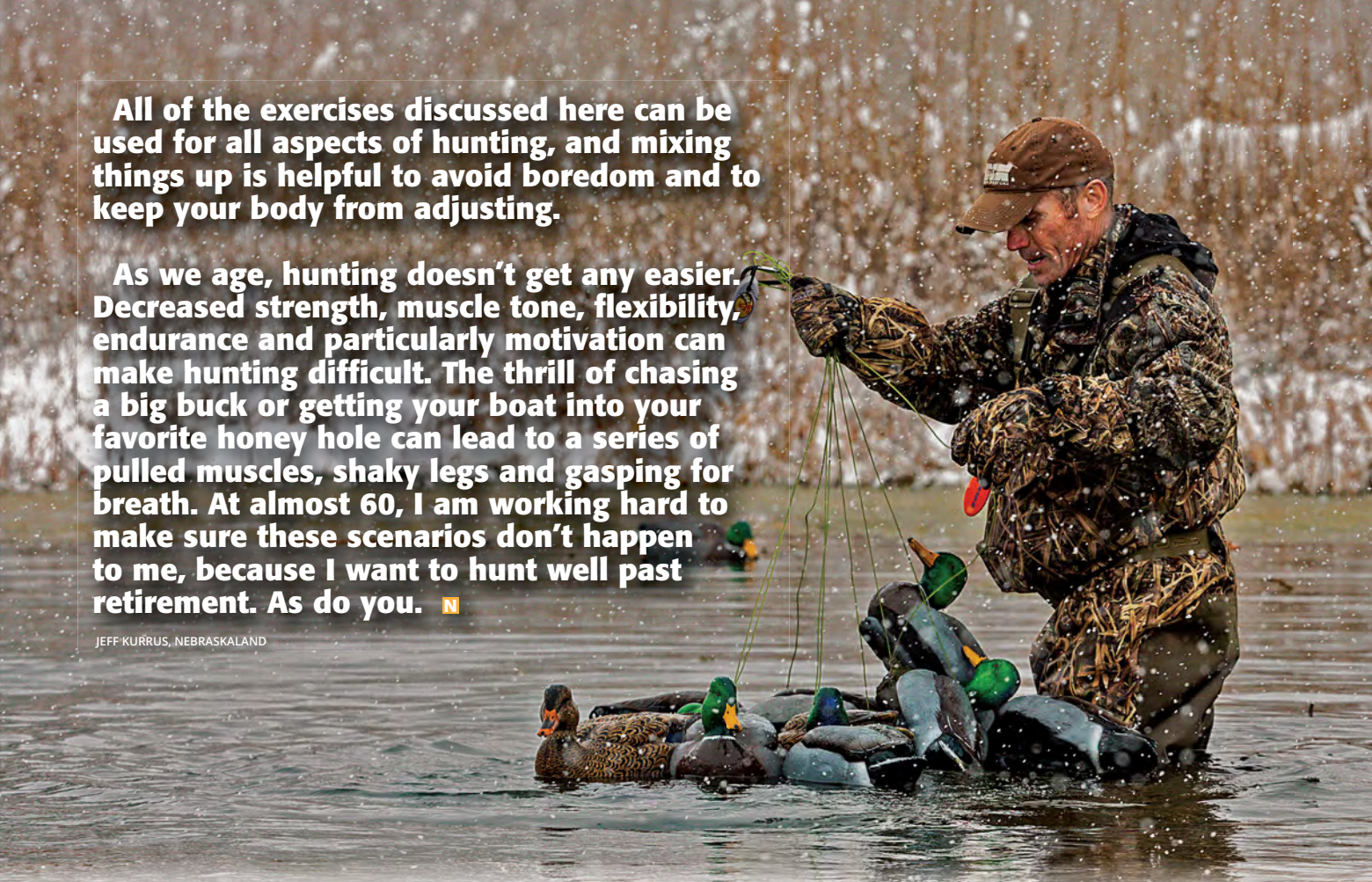
Lunges – Maybe one of the most important leg exercises when preparing for long walks on uneven ground. You can start with a standing lunge and then progress to walking lunges as your condition improves. Do not allow your knee to go over your toe to get the most benefit and to prevent putting too much stress on your knees.



All of the exercises discussed here can be used for all aspects of hunting, and mixing things up is helpful to avoid boredom and to keep your body from adjusting.

As we age, hunting doesn't get any easier. Decreased strength, muscle tone, flexibility, endurance and particularly motivation can make hunting difficult. The thrill of chasing a big buck or getting your boat into your favorite honey hole can lead to a series of pulled muscles, shaky legs and gasping for breath. At almost 60, I am working hard to make sure these scenarios don't happen to me, because I want to hunt well past retirement. As do you. **N**

JEFF KURRUS, NEBRASKALAND



Nutrition as We Age

Although the focus of this article is on physical conditioning for the aging hunter, nutrition and recovery are just as critical as the workouts themselves.

It is estimated that on a hunt, you can burn anywhere from 150 to 500 calories an hour depending on the conditions. So, having both an "off-season" and "in-season" calorie intake is crucial to maintaining a weight that will not impede your activity level. Imagine being 20-30 pounds overweight and then strapping 20 pounds of hunting gear over your shoulder. You've got no shot to make hunting happen as you grow older if you're not at "playing" weight.

OFF-SEASON DIET

There are a lot of theories on fad diets. Bottom line: It will always boil down to calories in and calories out. While there is no fast or quick fix to eating right, here are a few tips to help.

Minimize Empty Calories – No need to stop eating sugar, just keep it to a minimum. Empty calories such as alcoholic beverages and dressings can add calories in a hurry. Like most everything in life, you can eat most anything in moderation.

Eat Small and Frequently – The typical diet of many includes no breakfast, small lunch and a big dinner. That won't work when trying to lose

weight and especially when trying to speed up your metabolism. Think about a race car. Only the best fuel goes in, and it goes in at frequent intervals. Our human body is no different.

Stay Hydrated – Drinking water frequently also speeds up your metabolism and helps your body process foods. Keep a water bottle by you at all times and avoid sugary drinks. Water is an essential nutrient for survival. There is a reason for that.

IN-SEASON DIET

You may need to eat more calories this time of year. Depending on what you're hunting, hunger and dehydration can come on in a hurry.

Prepare for the Day – Make sure you pack plenty of healthy snacks for the day. Since you never know how things will work out, be prepared for the worst. Almonds, low-sugar protein bars and dried fruit are all good options to pack and carry.

DON'T OVERINDULGE

Nothing ruins a hunt like overindulging the night before. I have seen many hunts ruined due to lack of hydration and the body not working right. Limit your alcohol intake, and eat during or after you drink to avoid binge eating on that duck blind breakfast.

Tips for Catching Northern Pike

A Toothy, Primeval Fighter

Story and photos by Julie Geiser



According to the 2021 Nebraska Fishing Forecast, these are the state's top northern pike fishing destinations.

For anglers who love a good fight, the northern pike, a needle-toothed, aggressive — almost primeval — fish, is highly sought after.

According to the 2021 Nebraska Fishing Forecast, Hackberry and Dewey lakes on the Valentine National

Wildlife Refuge, Box Butte Reservoir and Lake Wanahoo are this year's top picks. Other reservoirs like Elwood, Enders, McConaughy, Merritt and Red Willow hold a few big pike. Several other lakes around the state have been stocked with pike as well. To find stocked waters near you, check the

stocking reports on the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission's website.

After deciding where to fish, here are a few tips to make your pike fishing trip a little more successful.

TIP 1

Find the vegetation.

After ice-out in early spring, focus on shallow, weedy areas near coves and shorelines where the water warms faster and pike spawn. Fish areas with weed beds and submerged logs where pike patrol for prey.

As the water warms, fish the flats and points leading into coves, typically in 3 to 10 feet of water. Look for structure near drop-offs and weedy points.

During the heat of summer, larger pike will head to deeper water, 6 to 10 feet, in search of baitfish schools. This is when anglers will need to cover a lot of water to find pike. Trolling is a good way to locate big northern, along with fan-casting to deeper weed lines. Don't stay in one place too long without a bite.

TIP 2

Use bright, flashy and noisy baits.

Spinnerbaits, crankbaits, buzzbaits, spoons and surface plugs with highly visible colors are often the best for

catching pike.

However, jigs with worms and soft swimbaits can also attract this voracious feeding fish. Lures of darker colors are sometimes better in murky waters.

TIP 3

Use strong equipment.

Gear up with at least a 7-foot, medium- to heavy-action rod, and a spinning or baitcasting reel spooled with a strong braided line of at least 20-pound test or monofilament of at least 15-pound test.

A pike's razor-sharp teeth can easily cut through line, so tip yours off with a steel or heavy fluorocarbon leader. Once a pike bites, you'll have a great battle on your hands, and you will need the proper equipment to land a big fish capable of bending a rod to its breaking point.



Using lures with treble hooks and trailer hooks will help catch pike. Oversized spinners, large plastic lures and top-water plugs work well for pike.

TIP 4

Don't get bit.

Pay close attention to the sharp teeth and gills of pike, as they can easily cut through your skin. You can land a smaller northern by gripping it behind its head: Larger pike might require a net, but be sure to bring a big one in case you are lucky enough to hook a 30-inch-plus fish. Lip-gripping pliers also work well.

Once on the bank or in the boat, use a jaw spreader and long, needle-nose pliers to remove the hooks. Use caution, as a northern will fight hard even after it is in the boat or on shore, the main reason you're fishing for them in the first place. [N](#)

For the latest survey information on northern pike and Nebraska's other fish species, visit outdoornebraska.org/fishingforecast/.



A northern pike is guided into a landing net at Elwood Reservoir in Gosper County.



Jerry Vieyra and Robby Rowland fish for pike at Merritt Reservoir State Recreation Area during the fall.

Your Camera Doesn't See Like You Do

Part 2 of 3

Story and photos by Chris Helzer

Have you ever wondered why the photos you take at dusk turn out grainy or blurry? Why is it that only the left ear of your deer photo is sharp and the rest of the scene is out of focus? Simply put, your camera doesn't see the world like you do.

The first installment of this series, released in the May 2021 edition, covered mainly field of view and focus, but also mentioned depth of field. This time, we'll explore depth of field further, but in the context of exposure and the settings that control it. As a reminder, depth of field is the distance between the nearest and farthest objects away from you that appear in focus simultaneously. In other words, there is a limited range of space between you and the horizon that can be in focus when you take a photo.

The Shutter Speed/Aperture Tradeoff

Depth of field is influenced by the focal length of a lens and the proximity of your subject. Within those contexts, though, you also can control depth of field by changing the aperture size (the opening through which light passes into the camera) in a camera's lens. A smaller hole creates greater depth of field than a bigger one. In addition to altering the depth of field, however, that aperture also influences exposure, or the amount of light per unit area that hits the sensor of your camera (or film if you're a Luddite or artisan). A big hole lets in more light than a small hole, and more light makes a brighter image.

What if you need a bigger aperture but don't want the image

to be brighter? Fortunately, there is a second regulator of light that allows you to change the aperture without your image becoming too bright or too dark — the shutter speed. The shutter speed of a camera is the amount of time the “door” of the camera stays open and allows light to pass into the camera. A faster shutter speed lets less light in than a slower shutter speed because it opens and closes the shutter more quickly. Fast shutter speeds also help capture sharp images of moving objects like running deer or swaying flowers.

On your camera, shutter speed increments and aperture increments (f/stops) are complementary. If you want a different shutter speed or aperture setting, but don't want



In this photo, the flower is sharply focused. The background is not totally sharp, but still contributes to the photo. Wide-angle lenses naturally have more depth of field than lenses with a longer focal length, making depth of field less of an issue.

your image to be darker or brighter, you can simply adjust both the shutter speed and aperture the same number of increments. On most cameras, that means if you rotate your shutter speed knob three clicks one way, you have to rotate your aperture knob three clicks the other way to maintain the same exposure. Depending upon how much control you want, you can make all those adjustments yourself. Otherwise, your camera will handle either the shutter speed or aperture decisions — or both.

However, while shutter speed and aperture are complementary, the decisions you make about those settings

have important ramifications. For example, if you want more depth of field and tell your camera to close down the aperture, you'll need a slower shutter speed to get enough light to make a nice image. That can create problems if you're trying to freeze the action of a deer jumping a fence or a flower waving back and forth in a breeze.

Shutter Speed and Blur

A fast shutter speed helps prevent blurry photos as a result of your hands shaking slightly while holding the camera. For



Low light forced me to use a slow shutter speed for this photo, especially because I wanted a small aperture to maximize depth of field. I used a tripod and a shutter speed of about ½ second. Note the effect of the slow shutter speed on the small waterfalls behind the fungus.

most of us, 1/60th of a second is about the slowest shutter speed we can safely use when hand-holding a camera. With telephoto lenses, you want to use a faster shutter speed number than the telephoto number (e.g. use at least 1/300th of a second for a 300mm lens). Vibration reduction technology in newer lenses can buy you a little leeway there, but it's still safest to follow the shutter speed-lens length rule. These issues are why photographers rely on tripods, which hold the camera steady when you need to use a slow shutter speed in order to get the depth of field you want in an image.

Deciding what combination of shutter speed and aperture to use for a photo can be tricky, and you can't necessarily trust your camera to choose the best answer. Your camera won't know that you want both the flower in the foreground and the hills in the background of an image to be sharp. Alternately, your camera can't anticipate that you want to blur out the distracting background in a close-up photo of a bee on a flower. When you're trying to make sure the eye of a bobolink is in sharp focus, your camera won't know that you don't give a flip about depth of field and just need all the shutter speed you can get.

Setting the Camera on a Priority

One solution is to set your camera on either aperture priority or shutter speed priority, in which you tell the camera which is more important to you and let the camera work within that set of parameters. If you set the camera on aperture priority, you can tell the camera to keep the aperture set at a generous f/16, which will make sure you have adequate depth of field to make both the foreground flowers and the background hills sharp.



ABOVE: A fast shutter speed of 1/640 second counteracted the breeze that was moving these flowers back and forth.

The camera will then automatically set the shutter speed to whatever is necessary to make an image with reasonable brightness.

On the other hand, you can set your camera to shutter speed priority and tell it to shoot at 1/1000 of a second to make sure no movement blurs that boblink's eye. The camera will

take charge of adjusting aperture as you track that bobolink through alternating patches of shadow and sunlight. Aperture and shutter speed priority can give you less to concentrate on if there's a lot happening. Just remember that you're still trusting the camera to make decisions and that it doesn't share your artistic vision.



The low light on the pre-dawn Platte River made it necessary to use a very high ISO just to capture this image. The image is grainy, but still holds together fairly well. ISO 1600 and 1/10 sec shutter speed.



The eye of this bobolink was the only critical focal point in this photo. Shutter speed, not aperture, was the priority for this image.

ISO Setting

There is one other camera setting that can help you increase shutter speed without losing depth of field or vice versa, but it also doesn't come for free. It's called the ISO, which, oddly, stands for International Organization for Standardization — a name you'll never need to know again. Without getting deep into the details, when you increase your ISO setting on a digital camera, it requires less light to make an image. Unfortunately, as you increase ISO, your images get more and more grainy. While newer cameras handle ISO better than older ones, that graininess still increases with higher ISO numbers and can create images that don't look good when enlarged.

If you absolutely can't get a photo without boosting ISO, boost it. Otherwise, keep it within a reasonable range. With many digital SLR cameras, that reasonable range is somewhere around 800 or lower. Some newer cameras can create decent images at much higher ISO settings, but most photographers I know still set it as low as they possibly can. Letting your camera choose ISO for you can be helpful when working quickly in low-light situations but don't forget that

your camera doesn't know your preference for "graininess" and you might not always appreciate its choices.

Program Mode

If you're just getting started in serious photography, you might choose to set your camera to "program mode" and allow it to handle aperture and shutter speed decisions while you concentrate on focal length, composition and focus. That's fine for a while, but as soon as you get more comfortable with the other aspects of your camera, it's a good idea to start taking the reins on exposure settings, too. There may still be times you set the camera on shutter speed priority so you can make sure that bobolink's eye is sharp as it moves around the prairie. However, you'll probably find that, with some practice, quick adjustments of exposure settings become second nature. When that happens, you won't have to trust your camera's brain to see the world the way yours does. [N](#)

Look for part three of Chris Helzer's "Your Camera Doesn't See Like You Do" in the July issue of Nebraskaland. The author will cover how to identify and use light intensity and quality.

Backpacking the Pine Ridge Trail

An Adventure Story

Story and Photos by Justin Haag

Traversing scenic terrain in the Panhandle, the Pine Ridge Trail serves as a rewarding weekend adventure.

Through work and play, I have been no stranger to the Pine Ridge Trail. Portions of the route that transects the heart of public lands in the Pine Ridge escarpment between Chadron and Crawford have served me well as a way to access scenic landscapes and wildlife, or just enjoy a short hike or bike ride.

Though I had been on many parts of the trail, which measures about 40 miles, I had never connected the dots in one attempt. That changed in June 2020 when my 17-year-old son, Sawyer, and I decided to backpack the entire trail in a weekend. It is something I had been considering for years and, with COVID-19 restrictions in full swing, it seemed to be the perfect time for such an adventure. To boot, it would serve as a suitable way to celebrate National Trails Day, an annual occurrence the first Saturday in June.

Even though covering the distance in three days did not sound too difficult, I knew it was important to be prepared — especially considering I had never been on an overnight backpacking trip before. I pored over websites to gain information from experienced backpackers and received guidance from U.S. Forest Service staff.

Overnight hiking has more considerations than day treks, and I was thankful backpacking has advanced. Provisions such as tents, sleeping bags, stoves and freeze-dried food



The author and his son, Sawyer, stand at the Spotted Tail Trailhead before beginning their hike of the Pine Ridge Trail.

have become optimized for weight and convenience. In the weeks leading up to our journey, Sawyer and I collected the necessary gear and knowledge.

While the Pine Ridge Trail may not qualify as a true “thru-hike” — serious backpackers consider those to be 300 miles or longer — it does provide a substantial challenge of three or four days. You will be hard-pressed to find another wilderness trail hiking opportunity this long in Nebraska.

Just because it is in Nebraska and not the mountains, the trail should not be mistaken as easy. After inserting the mileage, elevation gains and time into an online calculator

for hiking difficulty, I found it doubled the minimum score for the “extreme” ranking.

Although an occasional ridge or canyon bottom provides level hiking, the trail does not follow any one valley or highland. Rather, it crosses a series of steep drainages through the center of the escarpment. That means many ups and downs. The elevations range from 3,700 feet near Chadron State Park to 4,590 feet just east of East Ash Creek. During the trip, we climbed 5,754 feet and descended 5,662.

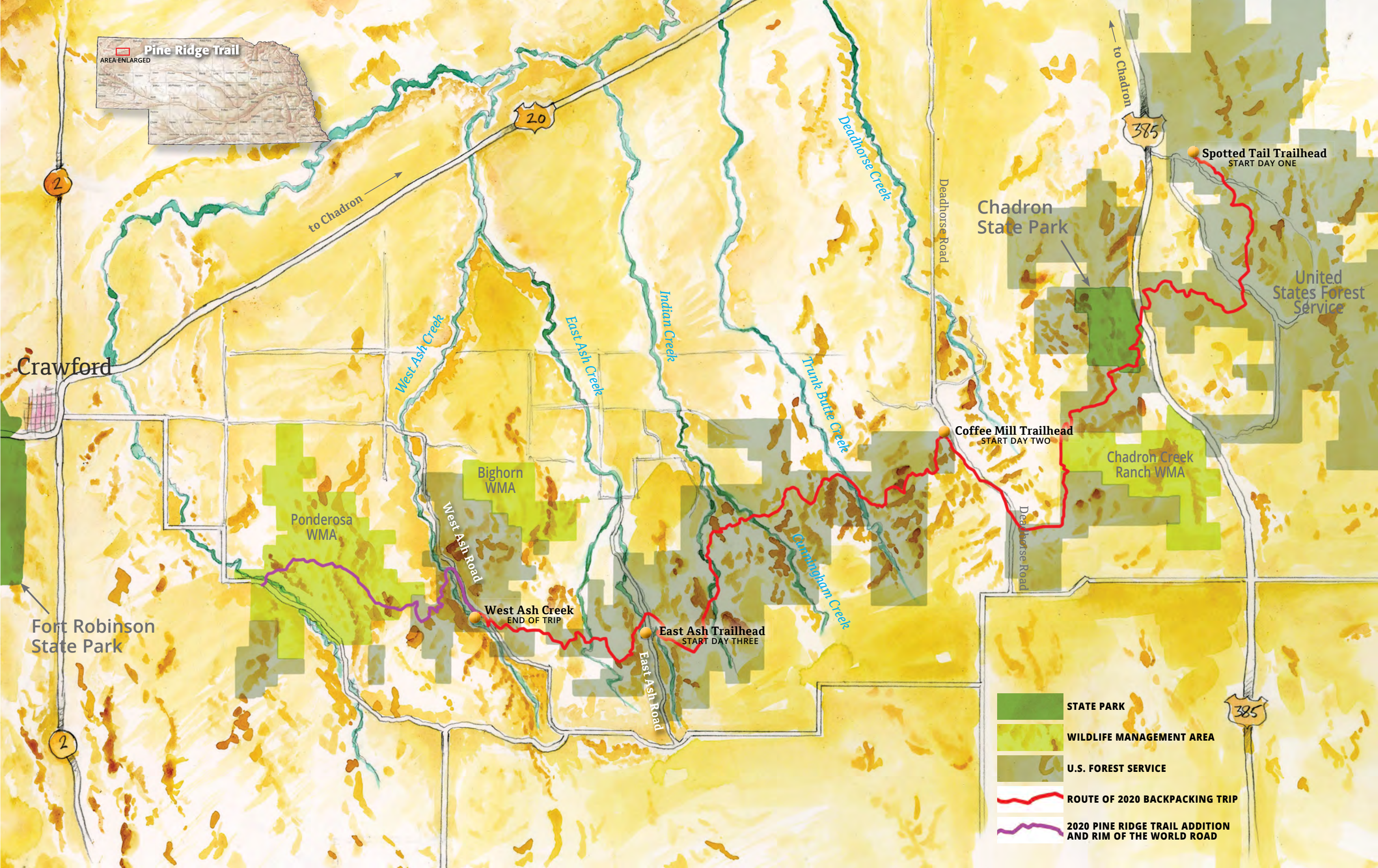
Horseback is surely the least physical way to explore a trail such as this one. A mountain bike is an option, but it surely

will need a lot of pushing.

The trail is not finely manicured. Most of it is unkempt single-track, with an occasional stretch of two-track. At times, users must search the landscape for the next marker post. In early June, we found areas of the trail to be choked with vegetation and ticks to be abundant, especially near creeks. An occasional cow pie and patches of poison ivy also needed to be dodged, though each seemed less frequent as we traveled west.

Because the Pine Ridge Trail intersects others throughout the Pine Ridge, you could easily stray off-course if not

continued on page 46



TIM REIGERT, NEBRASKALAND

Prepping for the Pine Ridge Trail

Necessities for backpacking the Pine Ridge Trail changes with the seasons, and one of the biggest considerations is when to do it. Nebraska's weather is prone to swings, and each season brings its own challenges and rewards.

One friend backpacked it a few weeks earlier in the spring, and others late in the fall last year. While they may not have had as many ticks with which to contend, they did have some chilly nights.

When preparing, backpackers should refer to a comprehensive checklist. Our backpacks came with one and outfitters such as the REI Coop have valuable resources online. YouTube is rich with backpackers sharing tips.

Water, of course, is essential. The Sawyer Squeeze system, which comes with pouches and is compatible with bottles found in the convenience store cooler, was among our best investments. Also, don't go hungry, but don't carry too much food.

Other items I would not go without: GPS unit and smartphone navigation apps, tent, sleeping bag with pad, comfortable shoes, stove and mess kit, first-aid kit and, of course, a trowel and biodegradable paper for abiding by Leave-No-Trace principles when "nature calls."

While a smartphone camera will be sufficient to record imagery of the journey for most hikers, my attempt to meet the photographic standards of the magazine prompted a separate unit. Carrying my usual heavy Nikon DSLRs and tripod was not feasible, so I used the much lighter hybrid point-and-shoot Panasonic FZ-2500 with a compact tripod. There were times I was wishing I had my beefier, more familiar, gear, but was always grateful not to be carrying it.

For those worried about encountering a mountain lion or other agitated critter: bears are not the only living beings that do not like to be shot in the face with bear spray.

More resources are available by contacting the Nebraska National Forests and Grasslands at fs.usda.gov/nebraska or the Northwest Nebraska Trails Association at nwnebraskatrails.com.

attentive. For most navigation, we used the lesser-detailed imagery of a GPS unit, resorting to apps such as Avenza and OnX only when we got in a jam. For most of the trip, we left our smartphones on airplane mode, using them only minimally to preserve battery.



With thunderstorms fast approaching both nights of the journey, the hikers set up tents in a hurry.

Day One: Spotted Tail to Coffee Mill Butte

Primarily because we live in Chadron and it would be most convenient for my wife, Cricket, to leave work and drop us off at the trailhead Friday morning, we decided to hike from east to west.

With excitement for the journey ahead, we left the Spotted Tail Trailhead at about 8:30 a.m. under a mix of cotton candy clouds and surrounded by green grass accented by shell-leaf penstemon and other wildflowers. Light winds and temperatures near 70 made for a beautiful beginning.

Many of the Pine Ridge's forested areas were ravaged by wildfires in 2006 and 2012. From the get-go, this journey served as a study in how wildfire transformed the landscape. Where towering pines once stood, blackened snags, deadfall and protruding sandstone landforms accent the sweeping grasslands. The remaining stands of pines and hardwoods, still considerably present, are always welcome on the journey when they appear. Regardless, every mile is beautiful in its

own way.

After the first 3½ miles, we encountered King Canyon Road — the first of four county roads that the trail intersects. We took a break and adjusted the straps on our packs. They were too loose at the top and causing the weight to tug at our shoulders like a poorly designed harness. The adjustments made remarkable difference in balance and made us wish we had done it sooner.

After another 4 miles, we crossed U.S. Highway 385 and entered Chadron State Park. The timing was right to meet Cricket and our daughter, Kiera, for lunch under the Lagoon Shelter. The park is certainly the most comfortable attraction along the route, and trail users should plan to spend some time there.

Only the park's horses are allowed in the park, so with horseback riders in consideration the official trail courses to the Outrider Trailhead. It is about one-third of a mile north of the park along the highway, and has corrals and other

amenities for the equestrian crowd. From there the trail circles Chadron State Park's southern border. Hikers and cyclers, however, have the option to enter the park's extensive trail system and hook up with the Pine Ridge Trail from a number of outlets — certainly convenient, but potentially confusing. We hopped on the Norwesca Trail behind the park's duplex cabins and followed it to an intersection with the Pine Ridge Trail at the park's southwest corner.

This is when the hike started getting tough for this short-legged, middle-aged man. With the afternoon heat and the stifling air among the trees, the steep climb from the park to the ridge above was brutal. Once at the top, a windmill with a full stock tank was a welcome sight. We used a filtering system to drink the cold water coming from the pipe and dunked our heads in the tank. It was a glorious pit stop.

Water is one of the most important considerations for a trip such as this. Carry too much and you become weighed down. Carry too little and you become dehydrated. It was especially



Sawyer uses the Squeeze filtering system, coincidentally manufactured by the company Sawyer, to drink water from Indian Creek.

important on this day, as a fellow hiker had told us no other water sources exist between this point and Deadhorse Road.

From the windmill, we headed south over Chadron Creek Ranch Wildlife Management Area. It is a beautiful piece of property I love to explore, but the trail passes along the fence at its lesser scenic western border. We welcomed the level terrain, however, and the U.S. Forest Service recently had been in with chainsaws to clear burned pines fallen on the trail — a task that has kept workers busy since the 2012 fire. We will be eternally grateful for their work. With 40 pounds strapped to your back, the last thing you want to do is step over a bunch of logs.

After leaving Chadron Creek Ranch and re-entering Forest Service property, the trail descends to Deadhorse Road. I had driven this county road countless times, and yet this 2-plus mile section seemed so much longer on foot. Each step became a challenge, but we knew we had to keep moving to make camp before dark. Sweating profusely, we were wishing we had been a little more careful about rationing that water.

Two men working at the sawmill along the road gave as a holler as we passed.

“On a hike, eh?”

“Yep. Started at Spotted Tail this morning,” I said.

“You’ve been at it a while, then. Looks like you might get a little wet,” one said with a grin.

We raised our weary eyes, which had been fixed on the road, to see the dark clouds creeping over the canyon. We felt a new sense of urgency.

Like children in the back seat during a long road trip, we often repeated a question. Instead of saying “Are we there,

yet?” the question “Where is the butte?” became our refrain.

After what seemed like an eternity, we saw magnificent Coffee Mill Butte against the sky above, and at 7:08 p.m. reached the trailhead where we planned to camp.

We sat down for a break, but with the encroaching storm clouds, we knew we could not rest long before finding water to drink.

Looking back, we should have had a better plan. A topographical map showed a spring nearby, but we found none in that spot. It was either battle the brush to get to a marshy area below our campsite, which may or may not have suitable water, or head back up the road to filter some beneath the last creek bridge.

We did neither. With the wind picking up and lightning becoming more frequent, we cowered to human comforts and headed down the driveway of friends who lived nearby. We saw some amazing views over the weekend, but their garden hose may have been the most beautiful sight of the entire journey.

With our bellies and containers finally full of water, we hurried back to camp to set up our tents and crawled inside with the storm fast approaching. Despite all the wind, rain, lightning and thunder, it felt so relaxing to be off our feet. The wind continued all night and made for a rough sleep.

When recounting the fatigue, thirst and weather of the first night, Sawyer would later tell me, “That was one of the



The Pine Ridge Trail takes hikers up and down a series of ridges and drainages, through standing forest, grassland and burned pines.



Day 2 – photo taken between Coffee Mill Butte Trailhead and East Ash Creek.

hardest things I’ve done. I thought we were going to die.”

We have since considered petitioning the county for changing the name of Deadhorse Road to Deadhiker Road.

Day one, 47,939 steps and 17.2 miles down.

Day Two: Coffee Mill Trailhead to East Ash Creek

At sunrise, we fired up the mini stove to heat water for freeze-dried meals and, of paramount importance to this old hiker, Folger’s instant coffee.

With camp packed up, we hit the trail at 8:30 a.m. for what was surely the most scenic day of the journey. On a related note, it also had some of the most sizable climbs and descents.

The day began with an immediate 350-foot ascent to the Coffee Mill Overlook, the first of numerous compelling vantages of the day.

This stretch of the journey would provide plenty of drinking water, as we encountered both windmills and coldwater streams. The trail passes over Turkey Track Spring, Trunk Butte Creek, Indian Creek and Cunningham Creek. Each offers peaceful places to take a break and enjoy the soul-soothing sounds only a babbling brook can provide.

The most memorable climb was the one that took us from Trunk Butte Creek up about 400 feet to the base of Turtle Rock — a landform that you will not find on most maps, but is

so distinctly chelonian in appearance that it should be noted.

At 5:52 p.m., we arrived at our campsite at the trailhead on East Ash Creek. Just as the night before, we did not have much of a rest before storm clouds cleared the canyon walls.

We raced to set up camp to beat the storm. While staking my tent, it blew from my hands and wound up tangled in a barbed-wire fence nearby. After careful removal — and a few swear words — I was more successful on the second attempt. Sawyer, in contrast, stayed calm and methodical the entire time.

For the second night, we got inside just before the downpour started. Thankfully, the storm soon yielded to a beautiful sunset with a chorus of birds echoing in the calm of the canyon.

Day two, and another 34,757 steps and 12.9 miles down.

Day Three: East Ash Creek to West Ash Creek

Despite my sore legs and blistered feet, Sunday morning’s hike was enjoyable, and we seemed to have a spring in our step knowing the end was near. A better night of sleep also helped.

The long, steady climb from East Ash Creek offered attractive views. Once atop the ridge, only one sizable drainage, which dips about 300 feet, stands between trail users and the descent to West Ash Creek.



Clouds glow above East Ash Creek Canyon, the starting point of the adventure’s final day.

As we approached that final descent, we stopped to snap a final trail marker photo and enjoy the view. After reaching West Ash Road, we walked north one-third of a mile to the



The backpackers stop for a selfie before descending to the West Ash Creek Trailhead.

creek-side picnic area maintained by the Forest Service. Time of arrival: 12:19 p.m.

Day three and another 15,121 steps and 4.9 miles down. The GPS unit showed we had covered 37.19 miles in 15 hours, 58 minutes and 56 seconds. We’d been on the trail for two days, three hours and 53 minutes.

Final Thoughts

With some of Nebraska’s most captivating scenery behind us — not to mention ups, downs, ticks, thunderstorms, cow pies and patches of poison ivy — we stretched out on a picnic table with West Ash Creek playing its soothing sounds nearby.

Cricket and Kiera’s arrival with a bucket of fried chicken and cold sodas was certainly a joyous occasion, as was an obligatory stop in Crawford for ice cream.

While traveling U.S. Highway 20 from Crawford to Chadron in the air-conditioned comforts of the truck, I marveled while looking south over the open plain. The familiar sight of the Pine Ridge in the distance, and the land we had covered, had taken on new meaning to Sawyer and me.

The journey certainly helped us meet our goal of “social distancing.” Even though we saw some horse prints,

footprints and bicycle tracks along the way, counting the number of other trail users met during the trip was easy: zero.

With a total of 97,817 steps, the trail also served well for my fitness. When I returned home, the scale showed I had lost eight pounds. Being our first time, we probably carried too much stuff. I have since read that backpackers should not carry more than 20 percent of their body weight. An old dog like me might want to get that percentage down to 15.

That weekend not only coincided with National Trails Day, but also with D-Day — the World War II battle of 1944 in which the Allies stormed the beaches of France under heavy gunfire and headed inland on foot to fight the Nazis through dense marshes and hedgerows. Our adventure gave us an opportunity to contemplate the military members who have hiked with heavy gear with the fear of being shot, to give us the freedoms to enjoy a recreational backpacking adventure such as this.



While the backpackers didn’t encounter other hikers, red-headed woodpeckers and other wildlife greeted them along the journey.

The Pine Ridge Trail

Four Decades in the Making



The idea of the Pine Ridge Trail arose more than 40 years ago from a desire to connect Chadron and Crawford via the patchwork of public land in the Pine Ridge. That goal still stands.

During our 2020 hike, the U.S. Forest Service was working on installing an additional 2.7-mile segment of trail from West Ash Road to Ponderosa Wildlife Management Area near Crawford. By using the “Rim of the World” service road at Ponderosa, trail users can descend to Squaw Creek Road, which features multiple parking lots for the WMA.

Although the new section is the first significant addition in many years, it is just the latest of many advancements since the trail’s beginnings.

The first chapter of the trail’s construction was from 1978 to 1981 by the Young Adult Conservation Corps, one of two federally funded youth conservation programs from the period. After the government terminated the program, the Pine Ridge Ranger District of the Nebraska National Forest continued construction from 1982 to 1984. During those periods, the sections from Spotted Tail to Chadron State Park and from trailheads at Coffee Mill Butte to East Ash Creek were completed.

In 1992, the Wohlers family granted the U.S. Forest Service an easement across their property to link East Ash and West Ash creeks.

In 2008, the Forest Service and the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission agreed to an easement for the trail through Chadron Creek Wildlife Management Area, providing a link from Chadron State Park to Deadhorse Road.

During the 1990s and early 2000s, a few shorter additions and reroutes of the trail on Forest Service land occurred.

Would I backpack the Pine Ridge Trail again? Definitely. Would I do it all in one chunk? Maybe, but I would surely allow more time to do so. With our Sunday deadline, it seemed we were too busy hiking toward our destination to stop and smell all of those pretty flowers. Short overnights to places such as Turkey Track Spring and Cunningham Creek seem most attractive now.

Regardless, Sawyer and I considered it an outstanding adventure and a way to gain a deeper appreciation of, and respect for, our home turf. Moreover, we contracted no viruses while doing so. 🍷

Red Willow State Recreation Area

A hotspot for outdoor activities

Story and photos by Julie Geiser

Nestled in the canyons of southwestern Nebraska lies Red Willow State Recreation Area. The focal point of the area is the 1,628-acre Hugh Butler Lake, named for the U.S. Senator from Cambridge, and its 35 miles of shoreline and picturesque water, sand and cliffs. Add in 4,320 acres of public land surrounding the reservoir, and whether you're looking to camp, hike, boat, bike, swim, kayak or hunt, it's hard to get bored at Red Willow.

Red Willow SRA is a hotspot of outdoor activity during the summer, but to enjoy all of it, camping is your best bet. Spend time at one of Red Willow's 48 electrical pad sites, equipped with 30- and 50-amp electrical hookups, or "rough it" at one of 24 basic campsites scattered throughout the park. Modern conveniences at Willow View campground includes a dump station, drinking water, restrooms and showers. If you love archery, bring your gear; a 20-target archery range is located near Willow View.

Family Fun Nights keep visitors returning to Red Willow. These free events are offered during the summer months,

and they usually consist of hands-on instruction on kayaking, fishing and archery. Attendees socialize with other families around an open fire while enjoying a hotdog cookout and s'mores.

New to Red Willow are more than 6 miles of hike and bike trails that wind through the area. In partnership with local organizations, the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission is working to expand the hike and bike trails to give visitors access to more scenic areas of the park and provide a more challenging ride. Thanks to donations from McCook Youth Change Reaction, a youth-led community group, 12 bikes are available for public use through a loaner program.

Fishing, boating and water sports are mainstay activities at Red Willow. Boaters have three ramps from which to launch, and there's plenty of room for everyone when it comes to kayaking, canoeing or waterskiing. Families who prefer to stay closer to shore will find plenty of sun and sand on the beach in the Spring Creek Area. There they can swim, build a sand castle or have a shore lunch. The beach is getting a facelift with the addition of 130 tons of sand and will be ready to use when temperatures start to soar.

Fed by Red Willow and Spring creeks, Hugh Butler Lake is one of four Southwest Reservoirs built by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation in the 1950s and 1960s for flood control and irrigation. In recent years, its fishery has undergone several changes to make Red Willow a great fishing destination, and anglers will be in for a



Red Willow SRA is located about 11 miles north of McCook. With 4,320 acres of land surrounding a 1,628-acre lake, it offers some of the best fishing and hunting in the state.



From boating and fishing to the popular swim beach, Red Willow is a summer vacation destination.

welcome surprise.

With the walleye population declining, fisheries biologists decided to stock Red Willow with saugeye, which is a cross between a female walleye and a male sauger. These fish are better suited for survival in the reservoir than walleye, and anglers will have a tough time distinguishing between the two species.

Along with the introduction of saugeye, tiger muskies also will be swimming the waters at Red Willow. Although these hybrid fish cannot reproduce, they are excellent predator fish, which is needed to keep other fish populations in check. The tiger muskies will have a chance to grow to trophy size, giving anglers yet another bucket-list fish to catch.

What's more, as one of the best crappie fisheries in the state, Red Willow has everything from baitfish to cove habitat to structure, which includes natural and new man-made structures to help produce big crappies.

Red Willow is also popular among hunters. Full of trees, shrubs, tall native grasses, canyons, deep valleys and high vistas, this habitat-rich area around the lake is home to pheasants, cottontail rabbit, waterfowl, mule deer, white-tailed deer and turkey.

And the reasons that make Red Willow a superb hunting destination also make it a birdwatcher's paradise. Grebes, ducks, geese, gulls and more migrate from summer grounds to

breeding grounds via the Central Flyway, and Red Willow is within that corridor. Songbirds have a lot of habitat in which to take cover and nest at the reservoir. The wetland areas on the west side of the lake are frequented by shorebirds.

Whether you want to enjoy camping, sitting around the campfire, boating, fishing or simply taking in the breathtaking views from the top of a hillside, you will find it all at Red Willow State Recreation Area. [N](#)



Visitors can kayak and paddleboard at Family Fun Nights.



Volunteers are working along with the parks staff to create a public hike and bike trail at the reservoir.

Nebraska's Fascinating Ferns

By Gerry Steinauer, Botanist

Spore-producing ferns are ancient plants, first appearing in fossil records about 360 million years ago, a time when amphibians were venturing out of the oceans to become the first land vertebrates. For tens of millions of years thereafter, the climate was extremely hot and humid and ferns flourished in the Earth's

expansive swamps, some towering to tree height.

Although the flowering and seed-producing angiosperms, such as deciduous trees, grasses and wildflowers, eventually came to dominate the Earth's flora, ferns continued to fill vital ecological roles. Sixty-six million years ago, for

instance, when a massive asteroid slammed into Earth causing a giant explosion, ravaging fires and general cataclysm, as well as extinction of the dinosaurs and three-quarters of all other life, ferns, spreading from refuges via their wind-blown spores, were the first plants to recolonize the barren land and begin Earth's healing.



Mackay's brittle fern growing on the cool, shaded sandstone wall of Indian Cave at Indian Cave State Park.

Sensitive fern
is common
in Sandhills
wetlands.



Today, there are about 12,000 fern species worldwide, ranging from tree ferns in the tropics to the feathery-leaved ferns often used as ornamentals, to small floating ferns in Nebraska's playa marshes.

Nebraska Ferns

Of Nebraska's roughly 1,500 known native plant species, only 31 are ferns. Most of these species inhabit the moist, bluff woodlands bordering the Missouri River and its lower tributaries, but other species grow in habitats ranging from dry, rocky cliffs to constantly-saturated spring seeps. Although a few of our state's ferns are common and widespread, such as the wetland-inhabiting horsetails and scouring-rushes and the coniferous and deciduous woodland-inhabiting fragile fern, most of our ferns are uncommon or rare. The prairie moonwort, for instance, which tops out at a mere 2 inches tall, has been observed from only one woodland



The maidenhair fern is named for the fine, dark hairs on its roots. In Nebraska, it mainly grows on cool, moist slopes of Missouri River bluff woodlands, often in large colonies. The fern is a popular ornamental in shade gardens and also as a house plant.

which is dominated by bur oak and cedar in the central Niobrara River Valley. Its habitat is common and a survey by a persistent, some might say obsessive, botanist willing to spend hours, if not days, on hands and knees searching the forest floor would possibly find other populations.

Among Nebraska's rare ferns is the

powdery cloak fern, so named because of its white, powdery leaf under surface. In 1895 it was collected from a limestone cliff along Weeping Water Creek in Cass County and never seen again. Perhaps, it was extirpated by limestone mining in the area. The nearest populations of this plant are in eastern Kansas where it also grows on limestone.

In 1893, the famous botanist P.A. Rydberg chanced upon the crested wood fern in a Sandhills marsh on the upper Dismal River. Botanists have never again found this plant in our state. Could it still be hiding out in the vastness of the Sandhills awaiting rediscovery? The nearest populations of this marsh and moist woodland fern are in eastern Iowa and southeast North Dakota

Few fern species grow in the relatively dry, upland prairie, by far our state's most abundant native habitat. Among these are smooth scouring rush, which ventures out from wet meadows onto sandy prairie flats and low slopes. In 1999, while morel mushroom hunting in Pawnee County, I discovered the state's first and only known population of the Engelmann's adder tongue, so named for the serpent's tongue shape of its spore-producing leaf. This diminutive fern was growing in and around a plum thicket in tallgrass prairie.



As with all ferns, the spores of ebony spleenwort develop in sori, the brownish bumps located on the underside of the leaves.

Where are the Seeds?

Like other ancient plants, ferns reproduce through microscopic spores. Early botanists, who had no knowledge of spores, were baffled as to how ferns reproduced. "Where are the seeds?" they pondered.

In medieval Europe, herbalists concluded the seeds must be invisible. Better yet, they bestowed invisibility upon those who possessed them, a god-send for the superstitious, and perhaps not-so-wise thieves and other doers of mischief. Finding the seed usually involved magic and roaming the woods at midnight, sometimes barefooted. If one failed in this adventure, it was often because fairies, goblins or demons had, at the last second, snatched the seed from the seeker's grasp.

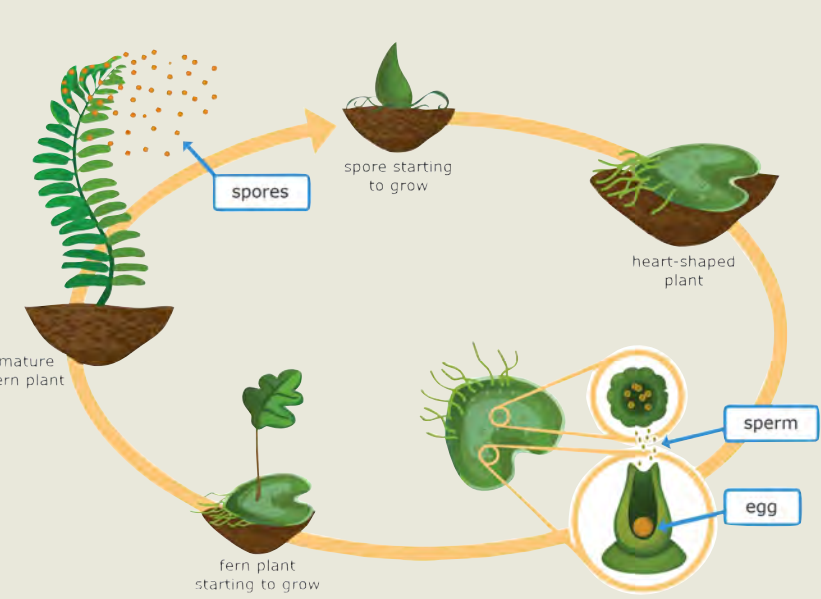
In the late 1700s and early 1800s, botanists, using the newly-invented microscope, unwrapped this fern mystery, finding "they had no seeds" and that their young arose from the "fern dust" that fell from the bumps on the underside of their leaves. Decades later, the dust was discovered to be spores, and the fern life cycle was finally understood. To this day, the complicated life cycle, quite different from that of flowering plants, still confounds botany students and leaves them asking, "Why didn't I major in psychology?"

Wind-blown Spores

Extremely light, fern spores can be blown great distances by wind. They have been found high in the atmosphere where they survive extreme cold and intense ultraviolet radiation. At such altitudes, air currents could carry spores hundreds, if not thousands, of miles.

Recently, three colonies of the never-before-seen-in-our-state cutleaf grape fern have been discovered: two in the woods at Indian Cave Park and one 40 miles to the north near Nebraska

The Fern Life Cycle



The single-celled fern spores develop in elongate to round, brownish bumps on the underside of the plant's leaves known as sori. When ripe and the air is dry, an ingenious lever-like action, which responds to humidity, catapults the spores skyward to be carried by the wind. If, by chance, a spore lands on moist soil or other suitable surface, it germinates and grows into a flat, green, heart-shaped structure that bookish botanists call a prothallus. Less than a quarter-inch in size, prothalli are usually hidden by other vegetation and are noticed by only the most inquisitive.

The prothallus under-surface bears sex cells that produce either egg or sperm. During rains, or whenever water is present, the sperm are released and, using their whip-like tails, swim to the egg. Once fertilized, the egg grows into the well-recognized fern life stage with roots, stem and leaves.

City. For more than a century, could botanists have overlooked this plant in Nebraska, or are the colonies of recent origin, their spores wind-blown from populations in northeastern Kansas? In recent decades, the ebony spleenwort also appears to have migrated into southeastern Nebraska, also likely from Kansas populations. If these are spore-instigated migrations, why are they occurring now? Could it be due to climate change?

Perplexing Distributions

Sensitive fern and marsh fern, both found in wetlands in the Sandhills and

spring seeps in eastern Nebraska, and several other mostly woodland ferns have perplexing distributions. They grow in eastern North America and eastern Asia and nowhere else. Why? The answer to this mystery lies deep in geological time.

During the early Tertiary Period, 54 to 38 million years ago, the Earth's climate was much warmer than today, allowing deciduous forests to span the globe at high, northern latitudes. In North America these forests extended into Alaska and Greenland and crossed land bridges westward into Asia and eastward into Europe. The above-mentioned ferns spread throughout



Mosquito fern grows among floating-leaf pondweed (center), mud-plantain (upper right) and duckweed (small, green floating plants) in a playa marsh at Straight Water Wildlife Management Area in Seward County. Green throughout most of the growing season, the fern turns a brilliant red in fall before dying and sinking to the bottom of the marsh.

this cross-continent forest. As proof, sensitive fern fossils from the time have been found in Greenland, the British Isles and Japan. Later, the Earth's climate cooled and the forests were forced southward, breaking their continental ties and isolating the ferns in suitable habitats in North America and Asia where they persist to this day.

The World's Smallest Fern

The eastern mosquito fern grows scattered in central Nebraska's shallow playa marshes. Along with six other mosquito fern species, they are the world's smallest fern. The penny-sized plant floats on the water's surface, drifting to the whims of wave and wind. The branching stems have many small, overlapping leaves and a few thread-like, dangling roots. The name mosquito reflects the belief that the ferns, when dense and covering the water's surface, keep mosquitoes

from breeding.

Mosquito fern spores develop on the leaf's underside and are released in clumps with three small bladder floats that eventually deteriorate, releasing the spores. Although they have spores, mosquito ferns reproduce mainly by breaking off of the side branches, each fragment growing into a new plant. Waterfowl spread the fragments, enmeshed in mud on their feet, to other wetlands. Highly sensitive to herbicides carried into wetlands by drift and runoff from adjacent crop fields, the plant has declined in Nebraska.

Mosquito fern leaves contain chambers that harbor colonies of the nitrogen-fixing bacteria *Anabaena azollae*, an attribute that is unique among ferns. This bacteria takes nitrogen gas from the air, which is unusable to plants, and converts it to a nitrate the fern and other plants can use. In China and Vietnam, mosquito

ferns have long been used as a green manure in rice paddies, and scientists are developing technologies to expand their use to other areas and crops.

Odd Ferns

With round, hollow, jointed stems and minute leaves that form a ring of blackish teeth atop each joint, the *Equisetums*, whose common names are horsetail and scouring-rush, look nothing like other ferns. Until recently, botanists thought these spore-producing plants were closely related to ferns, but not true ferns. Recent DNA analysis, however, shows close genetic ties between the two groups: *Equisetums* are true ferns that diverged form-wise from the other ferns eons ago. Their giant, now extinct ancestors, the *Calamites*, soared to nearly 70 feet in height.

Four species of *Equisetum* now inhabit Nebraska. Reaching more than

3 feet in height, common field horsetail, common scouring-rush and smooth scouring-rush are widespread, growing on moist shorelines, floodplain forests and wet meadows. Field horsetail is our only somewhat weedy fern. Spreading via rhizomes, it forms colonies in roadsides and crop fields where it draws the ire of farmers. Known from only a few Sandhills marshes, water horsetail begins growth submerged in up to a foot of water before emerging above the surface.

Many people are familiar with horsetails and scouring rushes because of their jointed stems, and enjoy pulling them apart, joint by joint. Creative kids have been known to string the segments together to create a fern necklace. From a more practical standpoint, their ridged stems are rich in silica, and because they often grow near water, settlers used them to scour pots and pans. The stems also make a great emergency fingernail file.

Equisetum's spore-producing cones, composed of highly-modified leaves, are born on stem tips. Unique among ferns, their spores have four long, strap-like structures called elaters that coil and uncoil in response to changes in humidity. When dry, the elaters uncoil, creating wind resistance which helps the spore stay aloft. When the humidity rises, such as during fog or after rains, the elaters coil around the spore and it drops to the ground, hopefully onto moist soil suitable for germination.

A New Fern?

Recently, an ecologist sent me a photo of a fern he encountered last summer in oak woods at Rock Glen Wildlife Management Area in Jefferson County. Although the photo is inconclusive, the plant appears to be of a species of shield fern never before found in our state. A collection this coming summer might confirm this exciting find. Nebraska's ferns continue to fascinate. [N](#)



Smooth scouring-rush growing on a stream bank in Richardson County.

An adult emerald ash borer
(*Agrilus planipennis*)
DAVID CAPPAERT, MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY,
BUGWOOD.ORG



CHANGES TO EAB REGULATIONS

By Julie Van Meter, State Entomologist
Nebraska Department of Agriculture

In 2020, emerald ash borer was found in several new counties in Nebraska. Some of these finds were the result of positive EAB traps, while others were infested trees reported by sharp-eyed citizens. New EAB-infested counties included Hall, Kearney, Seward and Washington.

EAB was first discovered in the United States in Michigan in 2002. Nebraska's first EAB infestation was confirmed in Omaha (Douglas County) in June 2016. An additional find occurred in Greenwood (Cass County) later that summer. The Nebraska Department of Agriculture enacted the Nebraska EAB Quarantine on June 8, 2016, restricting the movement of regulated material from Cass, Dodge, Douglas, Sarpy and Washington counties, to slow the spread of the pest across the state. In 2018, NDA revised the Nebraska EAB quarantine effective Nov. 1, 2018, adding Lancaster, Otoe and Saunders counties, based on new finds.

The 2020 finds caused the state to review the EAB quarantine and its regulatory approach. The decision was made to rescind the state quarantine, effective Oct. 30, 2020. This change reflected an acknowledgement that EAB is established in much of the state and will be a long-term pest.

It also shifts resources from a regulatory to a management approach. The U.S. Department of Agriculture lifted the federal quarantine on Jan. 15, 2021.

NDA continues to work with the USDA and other partners to slow the spread of EAB in Nebraska, including conducting surveys for EAB in non-infested counties and using biocontrol releases as a long-term management strategy. Additionally, NDA will continue EAB education and outreach efforts to promote the responsible disposal of ash materials and the "Don't Move Firewood" campaign.

Moving infested firewood is one of the fastest ways to spread plant pests, including EAB, across the state. Nebraskans should continue to obtain firewood where you plan to burn it, to prevent accidental introductions of plant pests. When ash trees are cut down, use or dispose of the wood locally to prevent the potential spread of EAB.

Citizens in uninfested counties can report suspect infestations to NDA, the Nebraska Forest Service or UNL Extension. For additional information, visit the Nebraska Forest Service EAB resource page, which includes treatment guides, at nfs.unl.edu/nebraska-emerald-ash-borer.

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A scenic landscape featuring a calm lake in the foreground, a dense forest of tall evergreen trees in the middle ground, and a vibrant sunset sky with orange and blue hues. A silver Leach Bashwhacker travel trailer is parked on a grassy field in the lower right corner. The trailer has the brand name 'Leach' in red script and 'Bashwhacker' in blue script. A circular logo in the bottom left corner contains the text 'Leach CAMPER SALES', 'LEACHRV.COM', and 'LINCOLN, NEBRASKA' with a red outline of Nebraska. The overall scene conveys a sense of outdoor adventure and relaxation.

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LINCOLN, NEBRASKA

Bashwhacker

A collage of six photographs showing children and adults participating in various activities: swinging on a large tree swing, posing in front of a stone tower, sitting in a car, reading books in a library, climbing ropes on a wooden wall, and standing in a library aisle.

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GREAT NO WAKE WEEKEND AT DANISH ALPS SRA

By Lynn Mellick

If you enjoy kayaking, sign up for the Great No Wake Weekend at Danish Alps State Recreation Area in Hubbard.

This year, on Saturday, June 12, join the fun at Danish Alps in a kayak relay race or paddle battle (kayak tug of war). You and your team — four members per team — will need your own kayaks and life jackets for the relay race. Minimum age to enter the relay race is 16 years old with one member required to be 18 or over. Registration opened May 7 for the relay race.

Paddle battle registration can be made the day of the event. Other activities include a beginners kayaking area, fishing and a kids zone.

Watch the Nebraska Northeast Parks Facebook page for



registration forms and additional details. A fundraiser fee of \$40 per person participating in the relay race will fund future development of Kramper Lake's kayak accessibility.

All other event activities are free. A Nebraska state park vehicle permit is required. In 2022, the Great No Wake Weekend will take place at Summit Lake State Recreation Area in Tekamah. LYNN MELICK

CREATING COMMUNITY

By Connor Graham

At one time, Nebraskaland Magazine or word of mouth were the only ways Nebraskans could get their outdoor information. But by the mid-2010s, those ways had expanded to newspaper, radio, TV, the internet and social media.

Recognizing the value in reaching Nebraskans where they were at, Jim Douglas, director of the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, formed the Communications Division and tasked its members with expanding the ways Nebraskans could gain information about the outdoor activities they love.

Expand it, they did.

Nebraskans and out-of-state guests now have more than a dozen ways to receive information and communicate with Game and Parks about hunting, fishing and recreating across the state. They include:

- Our sister websites —

Nebraskalandmagazine.com and OutdoorNebraska.org. In addition to the agency's news releases, people can find four blogs covering fishing, hunting, hunter safety, and outdoor recreation; magazine content; trip planners; and more.

- Social media — The agency is on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest and YouTube, and offers outdoor news, natural histories, events, educational content, videos, recipes and more.
- Radio — Nebraska Outdoors Radio with hosts Jeff Rawlinson and Aaron Hershberger, The Great Outdoor Radio Show with host Greg Wagner, and Panhandle Passages with host Justin Haag all offer relevant, seasonal outdoors content.
- Podcasts — An all-female set of hosts releases a weekly podcast, "She Goes Outdoors," for women pursuing



outdoor recreation.

- E-newsletters — Love to hunt? Love to fish? Love to go explore state parks? Game and Parks sends weekly or seasonal electronic newsletters to constituents based on interest.

Of course, after nearly 100 years, the physical copy of Nebraskaland Magazine remains a stalwart.



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OTTER SEASON PROPOSED

By Eric Fowler

Just 35 years ago, there were no North American river otters in Nebraska. That there could be a trapping season this fall for the species is testament to the success of a reintroduction effort and the conservation efforts that followed, a rarity in the realm of threatened and endangered species.

The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission's Board of Commissioners will consider approval of a pilot trapping season at its meeting June 11 in Chadron. As proposed, the season would open Nov. 1 to anyone with a Nebraska Fur Harvest permit. Trappers would be required to report their catches by phone or online, and the season would close three days after a trigger of 75 otters has been reached or Feb. 1. This allows trappers the two days time they are allowed by regulation to check their underwater traps.

Sam Wilson, furbearer program manager with the Commission, said he expects the final harvest total to be between 75 and 150 otters, a level that will allow the population to continue to grow. Monitoring will continue, and the prospects of more seasons revisited next year.

The proposed season comes one year after the river otter was removed from the state's list of threatened species. That move came following several studies of the distribution and population density of the species.

Following decades of unregulated trapping, river otters were extirpated from Nebraska in the early 1900s, and gone or rare in 13 other states in the Midwest by the middle of the 20th century. Nebraska was one of 21 states, including 10 in the Midwest, to reintroduce otters. Between 1986 and



A family of river otters stands on the edge of a slough along the Platte River in Hall County. ERIC FOWLER, NEBRASKALAND

1991, biologists released 159 otters, most acquired from Louisiana or Alaska, at seven sites on the Calamus, Cedar, Elkhorn, Niobrara, Platte, North Platte and South Loup rivers.

Research and monitoring has found otters have expanded their range within those river basins and beyond, with otters likely from Iowa, Missouri and Kansas moving into the Missouri, Nemaha, Blue and Republican rivers. Wilson said there are now likely more than 2,200 otters in the state.

As the number of otters has increased, so to have complaints from owners of ponds, fish farms and fish hatcheries: Otters are superb hunters and can affect fish populations in these locations. A season will provide a legal means of controlling the species.

Another reason for the proposed season is that trappers catch some otters while targeting beavers, a species that can cause issues for landowners and must be controlled. Since reintroduction efforts began, they have caught 15 to 30 annually, and are required to deliver those otters to a Game and Parks office or Conservation officer.

Trappers have been a valuable partner in river otter monitoring and recovery. They have become adept

at avoiding setting traps in locations where they might catch an otter, and through annual surveys provided information that helped biologists track the expansion of the population.

"This pilot season will allow otters to be managed more similarly to other furbearers, where there is less burden on trappers and provide more options for people who may have damage," Wilson said. "It also provides an opportunity for people who want to pursue otters."

Many Midwestern states, including those bordering Nebraska, have already established otter seasons. Missouri was the first to do so in 1996, and now harvests between 1,000 and 4,000 animals a year during a 112-day season. Iowa opened a season in 2006, Kansas in 2011 and South Dakota in 2020.

The river otter's recovery is seen as one of the best examples of the successful recovery of a threatened or endangered species. "Here you have a species that was native and widespread, but then entirely extirpated, as far as we know, and then brought back and they have flourished not only in Nebraska, but also across the other Midwestern states," Wilson said.



CHADRON STATE PARK CENTENNIAL BIRTHDAY BASH

Friday, June 11 • 5-10 p.m.
Saturday, June 12 • 8 am – 10 p.m.
Chadron State Park

FRIDAY NIGHT ACTIVITIES INCLUDE

- Food vendors, beer and wine garden
- Live music with the Bar Flies
- Laser light show at 10 p.m.

SATURDAY ACTIVITIES INCLUDE

- Run for the Hills 5K, 10K
- Craft and food vendors
- Paddleboats, kayaks, fishing
- New Shooting Range Grand Opening
- Stagecoach rides
- \$1 sloppy joe lunch (12-2 p.m.) at Trading Post; Cheap Date live band
- Bounce house
- Car show
- Naturalist activities, wildlife display
- Dutch oven and blacksmith demonstrations
- Canoe regatta race and treasure dive
- Food vendors, beer and wine garden
- Live music with the Twin River Band
- Laser light show at 10 p.m.





Indian Cave State Park 1981. Sposato family visiting the cave.
 – Elizabeth Sposato, Lincoln



Chimney Rock 1985. Blake, Reed, and Dan Anderson.
 – Sue Anderson, Lincoln



Fremont Lakes 1960s. My parents, Joe and Helene Hladik, loved the state parks. Joe always had a camera handy. This shot was taken by me in the later 1960s at Fremont Lakes. Not sure which lake. The collie is Cinderella and the Peke/Pom is Rusty. At least one day out of the week (summer-fall) was a ride to the great outdoors.
 – Robert Hladik, Sr., Omaha

Send contributions to: Portraits from the Past, Nebraskaland Magazine, P.O. Box 30370, Lincoln, NE 68503-0370. Or e-mail to Tim.Reigert@Nebraska.gov. Photos should show people enjoying Nebraska outdoor activities, such as camping, boating, hunting or fishing, and must have been taken before 2000. We will give priority to unusual photos or activities. When possible, please include a story about the photograph and identify the people, places and approximate date it was taken. Text may be edited and photos adjusted for reproduction. All photos will be returned.



Dead Timber 1955. A field trip to Dead Timber State Recreation Area back in 1955. District 36, taught by Miss Marion Terkildsen, took students (pictured): Gary Suhr; Rodney Ahrndt; Glen Suhr (myself); and Ruth Spaulding. The hills surrounding the lake were challenging to climb. The swinging bridge was a treat and the shelter was relaxing. Always a fun day.
 – Glen Suhr, Scribner

Rock Creek Station Historical State Park 1985. This picture was taken not long after the park was open for camping. Note the lack of trees. After an afternoon of hiking the park, we took a break on the logs. Top: Sara Perau and Lori Wolfe. Seated: Brad, Blaine, and Rose Perau; Mark Wolfe (me); Max, the dog; Linda and Jim Schmersal. My wife, Marge, took the picture. Our three families have camped together for more than 35 years.
 – Mark Wolfe, Lincoln



ONE MEMORABLE PHOTOSHOOT

By Jeff Kurrus

I’ve never seen a group of photographers more excited. While the rest of the crowd was awaiting the peregrine falcon release at the Nebraska Capitol in Lincoln from ground level, a group of us were being allowed to photograph the release from atop the building.

To access this area, we were led by the Capitol’s security staff through a series of Hogwarts-like passageways not open to the general public. The group, loaded down with video and still cameras, happily conversed as we followed Elaine Bachel, a volunteer from Raptor Recovery, and the bird she carefully held in her hands.

When we arrived at the 14th floor deck, each of the photographers — including Alex Wiles who is now a Nebraska Game and Parks Commission videographer and then was covering the release for Fontenelle — aligned ourselves on both sides of Elaine, still discussing our positioning in an effort to fit everyone in while staying out of the background of each other’s images.

The next part happened so suddenly that none of us quite knew what to do. Elaine turned left and right, said, “You ready?” but never waited for a response.

She suddenly released the bird, and all of its beauty, as we frantically laid on our shutter buttons in an attempt to capture what we could.

The peregrine disappeared into the sky above Lincoln, and we were left frozen and dumbfounded by what had just happened.

Silent and defeated, not a single person peeked at their images on the walk back down to the ground floor. We all knew how bad they were.



Elaine Bachel releases the peregrine falcon from the 14th floor of the state capitol building while I got an image of its behind. JEFF KURRUS, NEBRASKALAND



My position provided a slightly different angle of the release. While not much better, at least we aren’t looking directly at its back end. ALEX WILES, NGPC VIDEOGRAPHER

The mood reminded me of flights home from Las Vegas, where everyone had gone with hopes of hitting the jackpot only to end up getting gut-punched.

We probably should have worked out a plan with Elaine on our way up. Yea, that would have been a good idea. However, that’s why it’s one of my most memorable photoshoots ever.

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