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NEBRASKAland

June 2017



Pictured is a native solitary bee (*Melissodes comptoides*) on purple prairie clover at The Nature Conservancy's Platte River Prairies. June 19-25 is National Pollinator Week. Photo by Chris Helzer.

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Sleeping Outdoors • Sandhills Blowouts
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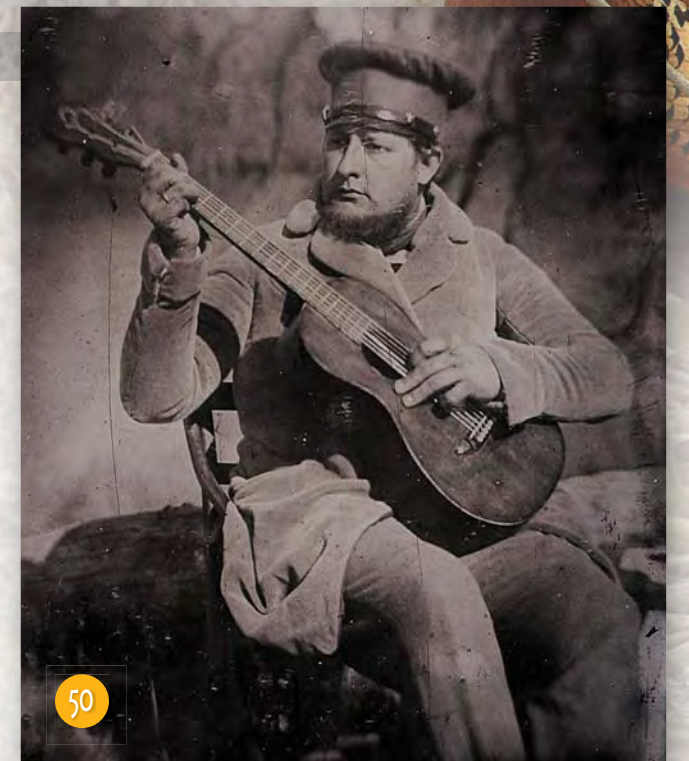
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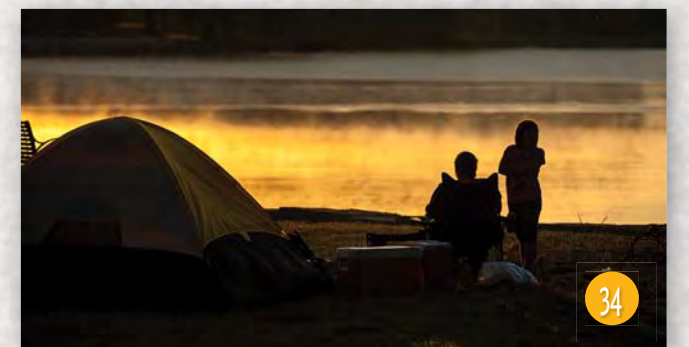
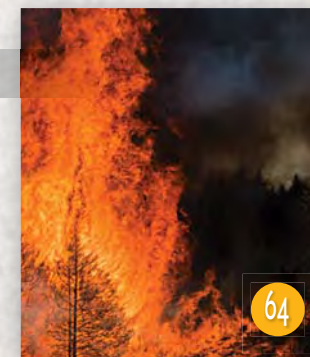
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THROUGHOUT 2017, *NEBRASKALAND MAGAZINE* WILL PUBLISH ARTICLES ASSOCIATED WITH THE STATE'S 150-YEAR CELEBRATION. LOOK FOR THIS LOGO TO READ ABOUT NEBRASKA'S RICH HISTORY AND VIEW OUR INTERACTIVE DIGITAL EDITION FOR MORE INFORMATION.

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Cover: A tent and campfire illuminate under a starry sky at Two Rivers State Recreation Area near Waterloo. Photo by Jenny Nguyen.

Newspaper Needs

Dear *NEBRASKAland*,

I just read your article in the May issue of the magazine. As a young boy in Boy Scouts, we enjoyed cold weather camping. My father told me that before going to sleep at night to wrap my feet in newspapers for insulation and put bread sacks over them. As a kid, I thought that was the weirdest thing I've ever heard. But my feet were always warm and toasty.

Also, at home nothing works better for cleaning windows than a newspaper instead of paper towels or a cotton cloth. There are no streaks and no bits of fabric. I also use newspapers to help caps, hats and even Halloween masks to keep their form. I really enjoyed the article.

Jeff Haverkamp
Kearney, Nebraska



Kody Brown from Lincoln shared this photo on Facebook of a barred owl. "It was a cold morning at Pioneers Park, and this owl was just watching me," Brown said.

LaVerne James of North Platte took this photo of a windmill and rainbow a few miles northwest of town.



— Family Fishing Events —

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Ron Hielt of Bellevue took this photo of a male cardinal at Fontenelle Forest early in spring.



Jaxon Stander of Louisville holds a pile of morel mushrooms, one measuring 12½ inches, from a spring hunt.



This photo of a sandhill crane was captured by Chris Clay of Omaha at Rowe Sanctuary in Gibbon.



Hobby photographer Sabine Kantenseter of North Platte captured this stunning sunset while going for a drive to look for wildlife near her hometown.



Outdoor Plates

Lynn Werman’s career brought him from Cleveland to Omaha in 1988. In the year before he transferred to Washington D.C., he met many friendly people in the small towns he visited – and how to do the finger wave between them – and forged such a bond with the state that he got “NE 4 ME” plates in Virginia. He scored that same plate when he returned to Omaha 28 years ago and another iteration a few years later.

If you have a unique outdoor message plate you would like to share, or know someone who does, e-mail a photo (high-resolution, JPEG format only, please) along with your hometown and a brief description of the interests expressed on your license plate to Eric.Fowler@Nebraska.gov.

Send your comments to:
Jeff Kurrus, Editor
NEBRASKAland Magazine
P.O. Box 30370
Lincoln, NE 68503
or e-mail Jeff.Kurrus@Nebraska.gov
Please include your postal address and telephone number. Letters may be condensed and edited. Photographs are also welcome.

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A Mammal Brief

Elk

By Lindsay Rogers
Cervus canadensis

Once common across Nebraska, the elk was extirpated from the state by 1900. By the 1960's elk were once again found in Nebraska, but only in the northwest portion of the state. Today, elk can be found in five regions throughout western Nebraska – along the Niobrara River, Pine Ridge, North Platte River and Loess Canyons. That said, young bulls can travel anywhere in the state and often several wander to eastern Nebraska annually. Although population sizes for elk are often hard to estimate, the state population is likely over 3,000. The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission is embarking on a new project to estimate elk population sizes using DNA found in elk scat.

Sexes can be distinguished not only by size – bull elk can reach weights of over 1,000 pounds while females rarely top 600 pounds – but also by the massive antlers on males which can grow to over four feet in length. And while both sexes have tan fur with a darker neck, the male's neck mane is also shaggy during the mating season. ■

Lindsay Rogers is an outdoor education specialist with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission.



PHOTO BY JON FARRAR

Convergence on Sacred Ground

Nebraska 150th Signature Event

July 21-23, 2017



Ash Hollow State Historical Park
Lewellen, NE

Plan to come experience history in Ash Hollow, refuge to the Native Americans, Nebraska cowboys and farmsteaders, fur traders, military and pioneers during the 1860's.

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www.Ash-Hollow150th.com

Pheasants Forever & Quail Forever Habitat Tours 2017

Title	Description	Starting Location	Date and Time
Prairie Chicken & Prairie Stream Tour	Participants will experience the spring lek behavior of the Greater Prairie Chicken and visit a prairie stream to learn more about the life and health of the aquatic species. A photography blind will also be available for those who sign up early.	United Methodist 403 S. 2nd St. Verdigre, NE	April 14 5:45am-11:00am CST
Fire in the Forest	See how Fontenelle Forest is using fire to restore their oak woodlands. Tour will include a short presentation followed by a tour of burned and unburned units to see how the plant and wildlife species are responding to the changes.	Fontenelle Forest Brewster Lodge 1313 Bellevue Blvd N Bellevue, NE	May 17 11:00am-2:30pm CST
Making Prescribed Fire Work for You!	Prescribed fire is a valuable tool on rangeland to reduce cedar and weedy species, promote high quality forage, and enhance wildlife habitat. See how private landowners with the Central Platte Rangeland Alliance are making this happen. Catered BBQ to follow.	Pizza Hut Parking Lot 415 Platte River Road Gothenburg, NE	June 1 1:30pm CST
Results of the Habitat Share Program	Tour the Calamus Reservoir and see work completed by Pheasants Forever, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, and the Nebraska Environmental Trust through the Habitat Share Program. All work is completed by contractors to enhance public areas for wildlife and hunting opportunities.	Calamus Reservoir 42285 York Point Road Burwell, NE	June 15 9:00am - 2:00pm CST
Quail and Working Lands - What Can You Do?	Start with a tour of current quail projects on working lands to see how habitat management practices increase quail and learn about available cost-share programs. A guest speaker will discuss how quail habitat practices also help increase forage value on your lands.	Alexandria Community Center Mercy Street Alexandria NE	June 15 10:00am - 2:00pm CST
Managing the Sandhills for Ranching & Wildlife	This tour will highlight challenges ranchers are facing in the Sandhills with eastern red cedar encroachment. The tour will showcase best management practices applied to improve Sandhills prairie for both wildlife and ranching. The tour will also feature prescribed fire results to control eastern red cedar encroachment.	Starving Stallion Saloon 823 NE Hwy 9 Ericson, NE	June 15 11:00am - 4:00pm CST
Where Do Your Chapter Fundraising Dollars Go?	Pheasants Forever and Quail Forever are grassroots organizations. Learn how the community dollars are raised and turned into local quality habitat, public hunting access, and result in introducing 735 youth into the outdoors each year. Tour will highlight local habitat projects.	Curtis Community Center 301 Garlick Ave Curtis, NE	June 15 5:30pm - 8:00pm CST
Mother Nature's Diversity and You!	See how adding diversity to your conservation project plantings can make all the difference in their success and add value to wildlife. Learn how it doesn't have to mean more cost. Lunch will be provided and a tour of local habitat projects will follow.	North Platte NRD 100547 Airport Road Scottsbluff, NE	June 22 9:00am-1:00pm MST
Quality CRP- What Does it Take?	The tour will highlight CRP management activities taking place in the area, and why such management is recommended to provide great habitat. The overarching goal is to identify what makes these areas so ideal for wildlife and pollinators.	Community Hall in 105 E Alice St. Wallace, NE	June 22 4:00pm-7:00pm CST
Fantastic Forb Friday	Join us on a tour of Southwest Nebraska. This is an opportunity to learn about plants that can be used to attract Monarch butterflies, honey bees, native bees and other pollinators.	NRCS Office 706 E. 5th St Imperial, NE	June 23 5:00pm - 8:00pm MST
Wild Landscapes	Native plants provide natural beauty, environmental services, and habitat for wildlife. Interested in learning more about how to use native plants in small-scale landscaping or gardening projects? You won't want to miss this tour.	USDA Service Center 1060 Wilbur Street, Blair, NE 68008	July 25 5:00pm - 7:00PM CST
Monarch Tagging at Lake Wanahoo	Join us for a Monarch Butterfly tagging event at Lake Wanahoo where you will have the chance to catch, tag, and release Monarch Butterflies, weather permitting. This is a family friendly event.	Ron Larsen Day Use Area 1651 County Road 16 Wahco, NE	Sept. 9 1:00pm - 3:00pm CST

Workshops are FREE! Please call 844-733-3669 for more information and to RSVP for meal count.



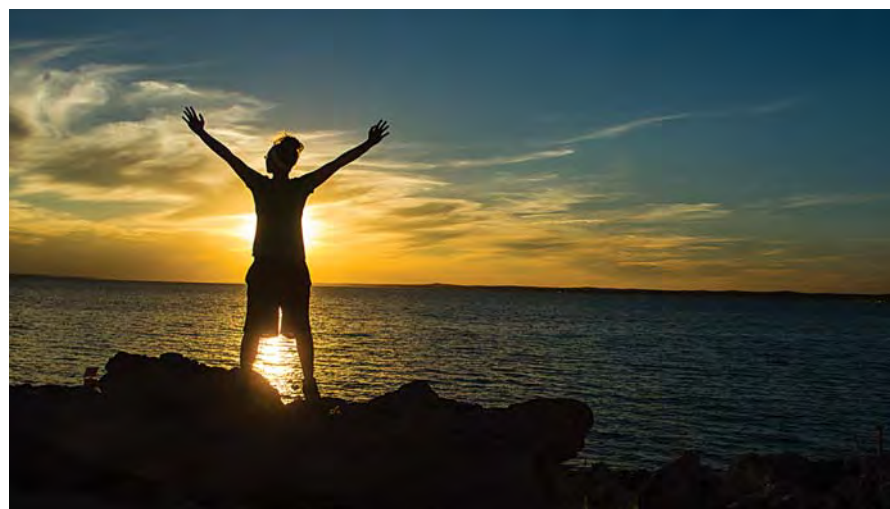
Buffalo Bill to Big Mac Road Trip

By Hannah Hundley, Nebraska Tourism Commission

Immerse yourself in the history of western Nebraska and travel along the same path the cowboys did on the Pony Express. This month's Nebraska road trip takes the traveler on a short trip from the famous Buffalo Bill Ranch State Historical Park to the family vacation destination of Lake McConaughy.

Along the way visitors can stop for a bite to eat at a local restaurant in Paxton affectionately referred to as Ole's. Ole's Big Game Steakhouse and Lounge is a comfortable and interesting destination that provides friends and family a place they can enjoy each other's company and admire mementos of Ole's worldwide safaris. After enjoying time at Ole's, visitors can move on to Ogallala, a historical town located on the old Pony Express route and transcontinental railroad.

Ogallala, originally gaining fame by being part of the Great Western Trails used for cattle drives, is now known for its rich old-west history and family friendly community. Named after the Ogallala Sioux tribe, this town is home to a number of historical landmarks and attractions. Visitors are welcome and encouraged to check out the



Brittany Daugherty poses on the cliff rocks at Lake McConaughy near sunset.

Cowboy museum, the Mansion on a Hill, and the Petrified Wood and Art Gallery.

Be a part of Old West history and stop by Front Street. This replica of an old western town has been designated as the "cowboy capital" of Nebraska. Stay a little later to enjoy a performance recreating life in an Old West cattle town.

The Mansion on a Hill offers a glimpse into what a classic Victorian style home looked like. Visitors can also view hidden gems, minerals and Native American Artifacts at the Petrified Wood and Art Gallery. After

spending time in Ogallala, visitors can then make their way over to the largest reservoir in Nebraska, Lake McConaughy.

Named after Mayor Charles W. McConaughy of Holdrege, Nebraska, this reservoir provided 1,500 people jobs during the Depression-era from 1936 to 1941. This man-made body of water is one of Nebraska's most popular locations for fishing, boating, water sports, camping and hunting. Round up the family or some friends and enjoy your leisure time cooling off near the water and viewing the natural wonder that is western Nebraska. ■



Ole's Big Game Steakhouse in Paxton is a unique stopover for travelers.

While in North Platte

- Visit the Lincoln County Historical Museum that is rich in local history including the famous North Platte Canteen, which served 6 million troops during World War II. lincolncountymuseum.org.
- A permanent memorial dedicated to the military men and women of the United States who served their country is on display at the 20th Century Veterans Memorial.
- Celebrate Nebraska during Nebraskaland Days, June 14 - 24, 2017 with rodeos, dances, concerts, art shows and more. nebraskalanddays.com
- Check out visitnorthplatte.com for a list of attractions and a monthly calendar of events.

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A Brief History

Stagecoach Travel

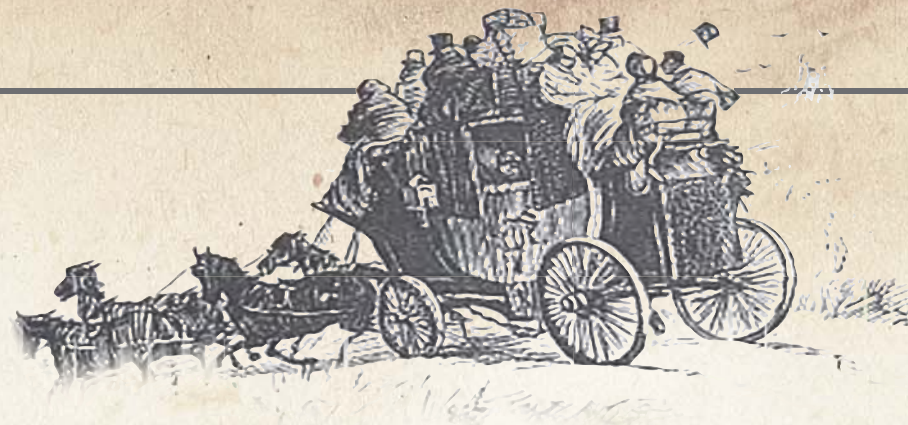
By the Nebraska State Historical Society

Few modern Nebraskans have traveled in a stagecoach, and then only in a parade or as part of a re-enactment. Traveling for days inside a crowded coach over the dusty prairie is an experience we can only imagine.

When Nebraska Territory was opened to settlement, however, the stagecoach was the principal overland means of public transportation for people who could afford it. Before the railroads came, it was the fastest means of travel.

Nebraska City freighter William Fulton in 1899 recalled his early Nebraska experiences that included more time spent in a stagecoach than he wanted.

In an August 18, 1899, letter to Jay A. Barrett of the Nebraska State Historical Society, Fulton wrote: "I left St.



Louis, Mo., in February, 1859, and came to Nebraska City by stage coach from St. Joseph, Mo. The ice being too soft to bear the weight of the coach the passengers walked across the river from the Iowa side."

Fulton said the rates for transportation of passengers were high and the wayside accommodations poor. In 1860 a typical man's daily wage ranged from \$1 to \$1.50 a day. Fulton writes:

"The Overland Stage Company in 1863 charged \$75 fare to Denver and \$150 to Salt Lake City, while in 1866 they got the price up to \$150 to Denver and \$350 to Salt Lake



A stagecoach bound for Fort Randall from a location in northern Nebraska or South Dakota.

City. The baggage of each passenger was limited to twenty-five pounds and there was a charge of \$3 for every extra pound. At \$1 each, meals, consisting of bacon, bread, and coffee, with sometimes game, such as venison, antelope, or occasionally a sage hen, could be obtained. Butter and eggs were unknown luxuries at stage stations, the former selling in Denver at \$1.50 per pound and the latter at the same price per dozen.

"We rode night and day in the stuffy, uncomfortable coach, journeying six days to reach Denver and eleven or twelve days to Salt Lake City... At that time a trip by stage was considered very grand, yet I have no desire to repeat the experience."

In 1861 Mark Twain and his brother traveled west by overland stagecoach, crossing Nebraska on their way to Nevada. In *Roughing It*, Twain described the coach as "a cradle on wheels" and welcomed the adventurous experience the trip provided. They rode "a-top of the flying coach, dangled our legs over the side and leveled an outlook over the world-wide carpet about us for things new and strange to gaze at. It thrills me to think of the life and the wild sense of freedom on those fine overland mornings!" ■

Visit the Nebraska State Historical Society's website at nebraskahistory.org.



Golden Spike Days Parade, Omaha, circa 1935. By the 20th century the stagecoach had become an icon of the Old West.



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to Nebraska's Past

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- Sen. George Norris State Historic Site, McCook
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- Thomas P. Kennard House, Lincoln
- Willa Cather State Historic Site, Red Cloud

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Nebraska STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Favorite Fishing Lure Debate

By Jacob Jadowski

Here's the scenario. You're going fishing but you're going to be blindfolded, put in a truck, and dropped off at an undisclosed location on an undisclosed body of water somewhere in the continental United States. You get to take one lure. What would it be?

It's a no brainer for me – 1.5 Strike King KVD Square Bill Crankbait. And if I had to pick, I'd take the bluegill imitation. The color, action and vibration are irresistible for a number of species in almost any situation. Obviously, bass are the main species that I target, but the variety of species that ends up on the treble hooks never ceases to amaze me. Largemouth, smallmouth, northerns, walleye, bluegill, crappie, muskie, carp, gar, catfish – I've caught them all.

And if that didn't sell me on it, a trip to the Snake River in Idaho a couple of years ago sure did. My brother and



PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS

I went and visited a buddy and he took us up the river on a jet boat in pursuit of steelheads. It was completely foreign to me. New terrain, new river, new lures, new tactics, I had no idea what I was doing but it was awesome. However, we weren't catching anything. My little brother had the idea first. He tied on a 1.5 shad imitation as the rest of the locals laughed at him,

and no joke, first cast he hooked up with his first career steelhead. The guys we were with couldn't believe it. It's the best lure on the market, period.

Editor's note: While I respect Jadowski's opinion, I respectfully disagree. If you do as well, email me at Jeff.Kurru@Nebraska.gov and we'll share our rebuttals together in next month's issue. ■

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Wild Edibles - The Common Mallow

By Julie Geiser

The common mallow (*Malva neglecta*) is part of the Malvaceae plant family that includes cotton – not edible, okra, hollyhock and hibiscus. These plants were brought to America by European settlers as a food source and for its medicinal qualities. Mallow has been used for centuries as an anti-inflammatory, diuretic, demulcent, emollient, laxative and an expectorant. The plant is rich in vitamins A and C, calcium, magnesium, potassium, iron and selenium.

Identifying the common mallow plant is easy, and it is one to start with for new foragers. Stems of the plant grow from a central point then branch out at the base as it spreads across the ground. The stems originate from a deep, fleshy tap root that makes the plant hard to pull from the ground. The leaves grow alternately from long stalks – or petioles – off the stem and are heart to kidney-shaped, shallowly lobed and have toothed edges. Short hairs are present on the leaf surfaces, margins and petioles.

Its fruits are round, flattened capsules that resemble cheese wedges, which gives the plant one of its nicknames: cheese plant. The plant flowers are either single or in clusters of three growing from the leaf axils. They bloom from around May to late autumn and have five petals varying from pale pink, lilac color to white. After flowering, seed pods form

near the flowering stem, which allows the mallow to freely reseed.

Because of its deep tap root, the mallow plant can grow in many different areas including: lawns, roadsides, crop fields and disturbed areas. Be cautious of mallow plants grown in nitrogen-rich soils such as in gardens or fertilized agricultural fields; the plant tends to concentrate high levels of nitrates in its leaves. The leaves can be eaten in higher quantities when not growing in nitrogen-rich soils.

All parts of this plant are edible and contain a mucus-like substance. Leaves and young shoots can be eaten raw in salads as a lettuce substitute or cooked as greens. The leaves have a mild, pleasant flavor. Cooked leaves also create a mucus similar to okra and can be used as a thickener to soups and stews. Dried leaves can be used for tea.

When boiled in water, mallow roots form a thick mucus – this liquid can be beaten to make a meringue-like substitute for egg whites.

Immature seeds are edible raw or cooked and have a pleasant, nutty flavor. However, they are usually too small to collect in quantity. The fruit and flowers are also edible and can be used in salads or stir fried.

However, before eating any plant, make sure to positively identify it and do some research. ■

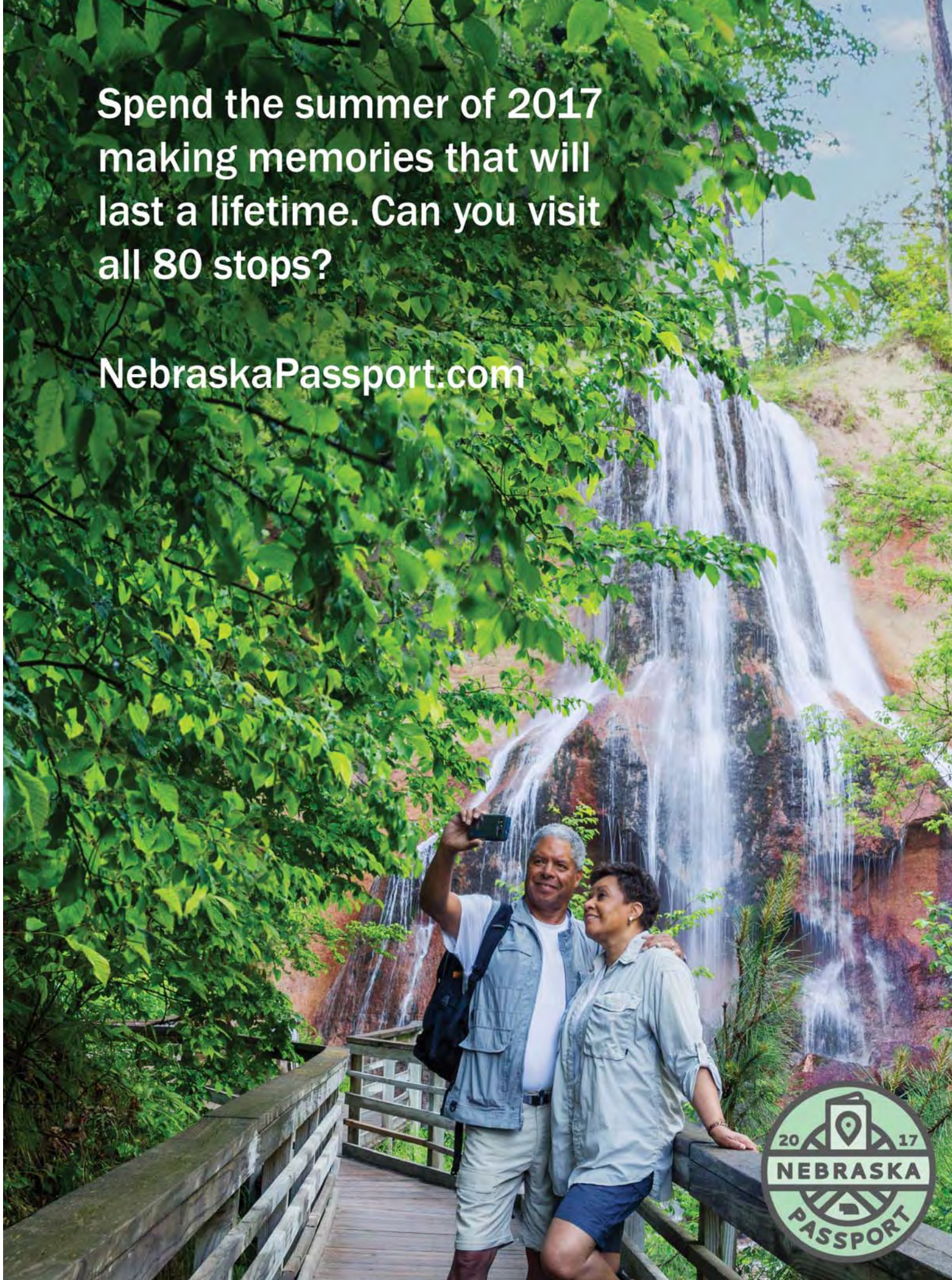


PHOTO BY JULIE GEISER

From root to flower to seed, the common mallow (*Malva neglecta*) plant is fully edible. Common mallow leaves and flowers can be eaten raw or cooked. Roots may be boiled to form a mucus-like liquid that can substitute egg whites in meringue.

Spend the summer of 2017 making memories that will last a lifetime. Can you visit all 80 stops?

NebraskaPassport.com



Boating Safety

By Jeff Kurrus

With boating season in full swing, consider the following safety tips to keep you and your family safe on the water.

1) Make a pre-departure checklist to be prepared for any water emergency. These include a fire extinguisher, first aid kit, flashlight and rope.

2) Check the weather before going and use common sense before getting on the water.

3) Wear your life jacket at all times. In fatal boating accidents, 78 percent of the victims drown, according to the U.S. Coast Guard. Of these, 84 percent are not wearing a life jacket. Comfortable Coast Guard-approved life jackets are widely available.

4) Boating under the influence of alcohol is just as deadly as drinking and driving. Due to sun exposure and heat, people are likely to become impaired more quickly when on the water. So play it safe and avoid alcohol when boating. The blood alcohol content is .08, the same as for motor vehicles.

5) Install a carbon monoxide alarm on your boat. Carbon monoxide is an odorless, colorless and poisonous gas that

is emitted by all internal combustion engines, such as boat engines. The symptoms of CO poisoning are similar to seasickness, but CO can kill in a matter of minutes.

6) Understand your audible signals and your navigation rules. You can find both, and more rules and regulations, at OutdoorNebraska.org/guides. ■

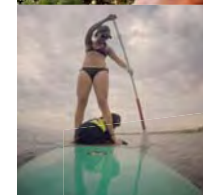
Thanks to Lindsey Lucenta and Herb Angell for their reporting on this article.



PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS



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 Images shared on Instagram by Nebraska State Parks visitors.
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My Photo Tip – Sunbursts

By Jeff Kurrus

“It would have been a really nice photo if you would have had a sunburst.” It was this brief, but influential, comment by my NEBRASKAland colleague Eric Fowler that turned me once again into a better photographer.

We were evaluating a set of images for our upcoming calendar and one sunrise shot I included just didn’t quite make the cut. “So how do I create the sunburst?” I asked.

“F22,” he simply stated.

Most of the time when I shoot, my SLR camera’s settings are on aperture priority – I set the depth of field and the camera chooses the shutter speed for the exposure of my choosing.

When the angle is just right at dawn or dusk, Fowler taught me to place my aperture on F22 to create the desired sunburst. However, before I shoot the



PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER

This sunburst photo was taken at Stagecoach State Recreation Area near Hickman.

image I make sure that my shutter speed is 1/60 of a second or faster. Anything slower and my shaky little hands won’t create the sharp image that I intended unless I use a mono or tripod.

I can also give myself more leeway

by increasing my ISO, but most of the time, because I’m shooting directly into the sun anyway, my shutter speed is not a problem.

My only problem is my regret for not asking about Fowler’s sunburst images sooner. ■



Sunrise on a deer archery hunt provided an excellent opportunity for a sunburst image.

PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS

Pine Wilt

By Julie Van Meter
State Entomologist, Nebraska
Department of Agriculture

Dead and dying Scotch pine, *Pinus sylvestris*, have become common in the eastern Nebraska landscape over the past two decades. Often the death seems shockingly rapid; a tree that was otherwise healthy looking is suddenly orange and dead within a few short weeks. The cause of the demise of Scotch pine is pine wilt.

Pine wilt is caused by the pinewood nematode, *Bursaphelenchus xylophilus*, a microscopic worm that feeds on the living cells surrounding the resin canals of pine trees. The nematodes rapidly multiply, feeding and damaging the cells, disrupting the movement of water throughout the tree. This will lead to rapid tree death, with needle color changing from a healthy green to a dusty appearance to orange in as little as a few weeks.

The nematodes cannot move from tree to tree by themselves. Instead they are assisted by pine sawyer beetles,



MARK HAPPELL, NEBRASKA FOREST SERVICE

Monochamus spp. These beetles are ¾-1½ inches in length, dark brown to blackish, with long antennae. Female beetles lay eggs under the bark of pine trees, preferring stressed or dying trees. The beetle eggs hatch out and the larvae begin to feed, tunneling into the wood. After the larvae pupate, adult beetles emerge, typically from May to September, fly to new trees, and begin to feed on twigs.

The nematodes will leave the beetle’s breathing tubes and enter the new tree through the feeding wounds to start a new infestation. The relationship is considered mutualistic, meaning that both the beetle and the nematode benefit. The beetle gives the nematodes a ride from tree to tree, and the

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nematode creates a suitable habitat in which the beetles can reproduce.

Scotch pines are by far the most likely tree to be killed by pine wilt. In general, native species appear to have a high resistance to damage or death caused by pinewood nematode. Introduced species don’t fare as well. Species including Austrian (*P. nigra*), jack (*P. banksiana*) and mugo (*P. mugo*) pines, and even occasionally eastern white pine (*P. strobus*) have been killed by pine wilt.

In order to slow the spread of pine wilt, landowners should use basic sanitation practices. Trees that die from pine wilt should be cut down and destroyed before adult beetles can emerge from them. If a tree dies between May 1 and October 1, it is important to cut and burn, chip or bury the tree immediately.

Do not save this wood for firewood – beetles will continue to emerge from it through the summer and into fall, to infest new trees. Trees that die after October 1 should be removed and destroyed before May 1, when beetle could begin to emerge. ■



YOU NEVER KNOW WHAT IS IN YOUR

LURKING FIREWOOD

Tree-killing pests, like the emerald ash borer, hitchhike on firewood and spread insects and diseases that destroy our trees. Keep your backyard, campgrounds and favorite places safe from these pests.

PREVENTION IS KEY:

- Buy locally-harvested firewood.
- Ask a park ranger or campground host about where to get local firewood when you travel.
- If you brought firewood in from another area, BURN IT! Don’t leave it, don’t take it with you.

BUY LOCAL, BURN LOCAL.

To report potential emerald ash borer, contact the Nebraska Department of Agriculture at 402-471-2351.

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PONTMOVE FIREWOOD.org



Mixed Bag

A Bow Range Nearby

By Jeff Kurrus

There is more than one Nebraska bowhunter each fall who asks that one regretful question as the nicest deer of their life gives one, admonishing blow after a failed shot and slowly trots away: Why didn't I practice more?

With a number of public ranges statewide, including the following list, there are no excuses. Start practicing so you can do your best work when these magical moments present themselves this fall.

- Big Indian NRD – Beatrice
- Branched Oak Lake State Recreation Area – Raymond
- Cunningham Lake Archery Range – Omaha
- Davenport NRD Archery Range – Hastings
- Indian Cave State Park – Shubert
- Lake McConaughy State Recreation Area – Ogallala
- Long Pine State Recreation Area – Long Pine
- McCook Archery Range – McCook
- Nebraska Outdoor Education Center – Boosalis Park, Lincoln (contains both indoor and outdoor ranges)
- Omadi Bend Archery Range – Homer
- Pawnee Lake State Recreation Area – Lincoln
- Pilger NRD Archery Range – Pilger
- Platte River State Park – Louisville
- Ponca State Park – Ponca
- Red Willow State Recreation Area – McCook
- Sac-Wilcox Wildlife Management Area – Kearney
- Schramm Park State Recreation Area – Gretna
- Summit Lake State Recreation Area – Tekamah
- Taylor's Branch – Pawnee
- Tecumseh NRD Archery Range – Tecumseh
- Valentine Fish Hatchery – Valentine
- Wildcat Hills State Recreation Area – Scottsbluff
- Willow Creek – Pierce
- York Archery Range – York ■



BOTTOM PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER, TOP BY JEFF KURRUS

An archer takes aim at 3-D deer and elk targets at the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission's Outdoor Education Center in Lincoln.

LAND FOR SALE

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KEYA PAHA CO, NE - 2700 AC.

Breathtaking scenery in every direction can be found on the multiple vantage points that are perfectly positioned throughout the property for views that you could only dream about. Multiple spring fed creeks wind and twist their way down through the heart of the massive canyons before finally reaching their destination in the Niobrara National Scenic River. This incredible property is home to abundant wildlife like whitetails, mule deer, elk, turkeys. Opportunities are endless for yearround activities along this beautiful stretch of riverfront. Access is easy via a maintained road along the bottom of the river bluff, providing ideal locations for campgrounds or cabin locations. This ranch is a must see with over 500 tillable acres and enough pasture to carry 175 cow/calf pairs. Property of this nature does not come to the open market often.

HALL CO, NE - 95.7 AC.

Here is a prime opportunity to own a piece of property along the Platte River. This property boasts some of the best goose hunting along the entire central fly way. Picture yourself cooking breakfast in the warmth of your propane heated blind, watching the sunrise cast the first morning's shadows over your decoy spread on some of the last remaining open standing water in the mid of winter. Once the waterfowl season winds down you'll be able to chase spring turkey before you grab a pole and start catching pre-spawning bass in the ponds. Don't count out the whitetail hunting in this area either. There is plenty of mature timber to hang stands as well openings to grow some grocerries to hunt over. This property offers year round enjoyment opportunities for the hard core hunters and also family enjoyment.



CONTACT JASON OR LUKE TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THESE AMAZING PROPERTIES



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Upcoming Events by Jerry Kane

June 1-30
Archery Paddlefish
Season start and end

June 2
Landowner Elk Permits
Final day eligible landowners may apply for one elk permit

June 3
National Trails Day
Indian Cave SP, Shubert

June 3
Aquatic Center Grand Opening and Dedication
Ponca SP, Ponca

June 3-4
Living History
Fort Atkinson SHP, Fort Calhoun

June 3-4
Rock Creek Station Trail Days
Rock Creek Station SHP, Fairbury

June 5
Pollinator Workshop
Calamus SRA, Burwell

June 6-8
Wild About Wildlife Day Camp
Nebraska Game and Parks Outdoor Education Center, Lincoln

June 7
Family Fishing Event
Benson Park, Omaha

June 7
Monarchs on a Mission Educator Workshop
Holt County Extension, O'Neill

June 7
Pony Express Re-ride
Fort Kearny SHP, Kearney

June 7, 21
Family Fun Night
Red Willow Reservoir SRA, McCook

June 8
Family Fishing Event
Mormon Island SRA, Grand Island

June 8
Family Fishing Event
Oak Lake, Lincoln

June 9-10
Western Sugar Cooperative Nebraska Fishing Tournament
Lake Minatare SRA, Minatare

June 10
National Marina Day
Lewis and Clark SRA, Crofton

June 10
Kids' Fishing Clinic
Alexandria SRA, Alexandria

June 10
Rimfire Steel Plate Challenge
Platte River SP, Louisville

June 10
Fish and Chip Tournament
Willow Creek SRA, Pierce

June 10
Wildflower Walk
Wildcat Hills SRA, Gering

June 11
Family Fishing Event
Terry's Pit, Terrytown

June 12-23
Deer Permit Applications
Residents and nonresidents may apply for one deer permit in any draw unit

June 12-23
Antelope Permit Application
Residents and eligible landowners may apply for one buck or either-sex antelope permit in available units

June 12-23
Elk Permit Application
Residents may apply for one elk permit

June 13
Family Fishing Event
Walnut Creek Reservoir, Papillion

June 13-15
Wild About Wildlife Day Camp
Nebraska Game and Parks Outdoor Education Center, Lincoln

June 14
Family Fishing Event
Bowling Lake, Lincoln

June 16-17
Ash Hollow Pageant
Ash Hollow SHP, Lewellen

June 17
Republican Valley Archery 3-D Shoot
Red Willow Reservoir SRA, McCook

June 17
Ranch Life in the 1860s
Rock Creek Station SHP, Fairbury

June 17
Carp-O-Rama
Branched Oak SRA, Raymond

June 17
Battling Rhinos Sculpture Dedication
Ashfall Fossil Beds SHP, Royal

June 17
Hike/Bike Trail Dedication
Fort Kearny SRA, Kearney

June 18
Father's Day Buffet
Fort Robinson SP, Crawford

June 20
Family Fishing Event
Holmes Lake, Lincoln

June 20-22
Wilderness Awareness Day Camp
Nebraska Game and Parks Outdoor Education Center

June 21
Family Fishing Event
Windmill SRA, Gibbon

June 22
Family Fishing Event
Cottonmill Lake, Kearney

June 22
Family Fishing Event
Towl Park, Omaha

June 22
Family Fishing Event
Skyview Lake, Norfolk

Every June at the Ash Hollow Pageant, volunteers reenact scenes from the diaries of those traveling the Oregon trail.



Battling rhinos sculpture at Ashfall Fossil Beds near Royal.

June 22
Commission Meeting
Nebraska Game and Parks Commission meeting, Scottsbluff

June 23
Family Fishing Event
Birdwood WMA, North Platte

June 24
Nature Center and Shooting Range Grand Opening
Wildcat Hills SRA, Gering

June 27-29
Outdoor Explorers' Day Camp
Nebraska Game and Parks Outdoor Education Center, Lincoln

June 28
Family Fishing Event
Prairie Queen Recreation Area, LaVista

June 29
Family Fishing Event
Carter Lake, Omaha



Family fishing in Kearney County.



Take the Road Less Traveled

By Renae Blum

Nebraska's state parks trail system has more than 1,250 miles of some of the most diverse land and water trails to be found anywhere. On Saturday, June 3, we invite you to come explore one for yourself on National Trails Day. Whether you are looking for a short walk or a rugged mountain biking trail, you can find one that will suit your needs. Visit OutdoorNebraska.org/trails for maps and more information. A list of park events scheduled for National Trails Day can be found on the Game and Parks calendar.

While you're out and about, don't forget to continue compiling a list of birds you've spotted for the 150 Bird Challenge, which continues throughout the year in honor of Nebraska's 150th birthday. The challenge consists of listing all of the bird species that you see or hear in Nebraska in 2017, with the goal of reaching 150 species.

Helpful resources can be found at OutdoorNebraska.org/nebraska150.

In addition to spotting birds, keep your eye out for species of butterflies, mammals, reptiles and amphibians. You can find more information about what species to look for, as well as tips on wildlife watching in general, at OutdoorNebraska.org/wildlifeviewing. ■



PHOTO BY JUSTIN HAMG

NEBRASKAland Visitor



Last issue's winner of the Visitor drawing was Frank Condello of Lincoln, Nebraska, who found the **soldier termite** on page 68.

Readers are encouraged to contact NEBRASKAland within 10 days after this issue's publication with the correct page number and name of this issue's "Visitor" – a critter found in Nebraska. We will then gather the correct entries and draw one to win a NEBRASKAland mug.

To enter each month, write:

NEBRASKAland Visitor
2200 North 33rd Street
Lincoln, NE 68503

Or e-mail:

Tim.Reigert@Nebraska.gov
with "Visitor" in the subject line of the message.

HINT: This issue's visitor is not on page 15, 25, 48, 60, 61, 62, or 63.

*Two species of termites are native to Nebraska: the eastern subterranean termite (*Reticulitermes flavipes*) and the arid land subterranean termite (*R. tibialis*). Termites are social insects, with three distinct castes including workers, soldiers, and reproductive termites. Only the reproductive termites have wings, and are darker in color than the other castes. Workers are pale and blind, spending their lives building mud tubes and foraging for food. **Soldier termites** have large heads and jaws, as seen in this image, and are responsible for defense of the colony. Termites look similar to ants, but there are some key differences. Termites have straight antennae, while ants are elbowed. Ants have a narrow waist between the thorax and abdomen, but termites do not. Both ants and termites have two pairs of wings, however a termite's wings are all the same length, while an ant's front pair is shorter than the back pair.*

Special thanks to Julie Van Meter, State Entomologist, Nebraska Department of Agriculture.



SLEEPING OUTSIDE

Story and photos by Jenny Nguyen

Some of my best memories involve tent camping. I was a Girl Scout during much of my childhood, and shortly after entering high school in California, I was a Venture Scout. Camping, backpacking and hiking were major parts of my life before college. The sights I saw, the connections I made, the things I accomplished in the outdoors – I always returned home with a sense of peace that most of the other kids at my high school could not fathom. And I also made lifelong friends whom I still consider “family,” even though I’ve moved 1,000 miles away.

But through all the old memories and fun times in the outdoors with my friends, I must not forget to look back toward home. While my parents were not outdoorsy people in the least, they had the wisdom to recognize the value in it. I was lucky – even though I may not have realized it at the time.

I remember my mom taking me to Girl Scout day camps when I was little, and my dad, who tirelessly dropped me off and picked me up at countless Venture meetings and long weekends of playing in the woods. On a Friday, he would say goodbye to his seemingly sane and tidy daughter. Then, the following Sunday, he would be greeted by a stinky, greasy-haired monster, who sometimes had a limp because of the giant blisters on her feet.

Whether I had been car



A night photo of a Kelty Zodiac 4 tent at Two Rivers State Recreation Area near Waterloo.



Venture Crew 167 of Garden Grove, California, backpacking in the Minarets of the Sierra Nevada Mountains in 2007.

camping close by, wandering in the desert for days or sleeping on a mountain, my dad always greeted me the same way: smiling, amused and glad I was home, accompanied by his famous line: “That’s a lot of foul laundry you got there.”

My brother, who was a Boy Scout, received the same treatment. Because my parents didn’t have the money to take us away on grand, expensive family vacations, they sent us back to nature instead. That was one of the best things they ever did for us.

So now when I go camping as an adult, I quietly applaud, from afar, those parents who have the good sense to take their children with them. And I’m especially impressed by

those who can effectively tent camp. The reason why I like tent camping so much is its simplicity. There’s no temptation to turn on the TV or stay cooped up inside. When you tent camp, you’re forced to cook, eat, do the dishes, play, read, talk, connect, and make memories outside. And when you sleep, all that’s separating you from the critters and the night are a couple sheets of polyester and poles.

Lying inside my tent, experiencing all the sounds and the sensations, it’s as if nature is huddled right outside my door. Are the coyotes really as close as they sound? I’ve never peeked outside to check. I just lay still, listen to them howl and allow my imagination to run.

Fast forward a few years and now I live in Nebraska. While tent camping here is generally not technical, it is accessible and also an ideal place to learn. With so many state parks and state recreation areas scattered across the state, a camping opportunity is usually just a short drive away for most residents. And in many areas, amenities such as showers and running water, as well as dedicated park staff, are available spring through fall.

I see Nebraska as a good training ground for new campers, which can lead to more extensive and challenging trips down the road. However, make no mistake. Even with our gentle elevations and well-maintained, easy-to-get-to parks, we do



Marguax Towne shows Journey Odom of Bellevue how to cook with a pie iron while camping at Two Rivers State Recreation Area.

have weather and insects. If Nebraska camping seems easy, it's because its people are hardy and have learned to be well prepared. Sunshine, high winds, rainstorms, hail, snow, sleet – outdoor Nebraska can be surprising. If you are equipped to camp in this crazy weather, I believe you can camp almost anywhere in the country.

TENT CAMPING

In eastern Nebraska, my favorite times to camp are during the spring, fall and mild summers, therefore a three-season tent is all I've ever needed. I own two tents: a roomy Kelty Zodiac four-person tent (MSRP \$99.95) and a small REI Half Dome two-person backpacking tent (MSRP \$199.00). I've owned the Kelty for nearly six years and REI Half Dome for over eight. Both have held up well.

If a relaxing, three-day weekend campout is more your speed and possibly with kids and/or pets, a roomier, less technical camping tent is what you need. I love my Kelty Zodiac four-person tent, which is perfect for two adults. When choosing the right size, it is best to assume that the tent will run small, so go up a size. There's enough room in my Kelty for a queen air mattress and plenty of room for packs.

When choosing a tent, look for one that comes with a large, waterproof fly, which will provide full coverage from wind and rain. Larger vestibules also allow for stowing away lanterns, chairs and cooking equipment during wet weather. While less expensive tents such as Coleman perform

satisfactorily under light use, they often come with tiny rain flies and flimsy poles. End-of-season sales are when you should be looking for a new tent. My Kelty came from Target at 40 percent off.

As far as structure, I personally do not like cabin-style tents. These tents may give you lots of headroom and may

look fancy with their dividers and walls, but they can be tricky to assemble, especially in the dark. They also tend to be less stable. Instead, choose dome-style tents, which offer superior durability and wind shedding capabilities. And if you've put together one dome-style tent, you've basically done them all. Also choose a tent that comes with aluminum

poles, which are lighter and more durable than fiberglass. Some tents come with a footprint and others are sold separately – this is a must-have item to prevent wear and tear underneath your tent.

Are you thinking of taking off for a grand adventure? If so, a backpacking tent may be a better option for you.



Under the direction of Commission Outdoor Education Specialist Christy Christiansen, families learned how to pitch a tent and cook outdoors at a Becoming an Outdoors-Family camping workshop at Two Rivers State Recreation Area near Yutan.



Children of the Janzen and Epp families play in the Platte River at Two Rivers State Recreation Area in the spring.



An assortment of camping gear the author owns.

Lightweight and portable, these space-saving tents are ideal for on-the-go traveling.

I still hold onto my REI Half Dome even though I don't backpack anymore. This little tent is easy to set up, fairly lightweight, packs neatly, holds solidly in the wind, and has survived through countless heavy rainy days with zero leakage. But typical of most backpacking tents, interiors are snug, offering limited space for personal items. With the fly set up, though, two vestibules are created to keep packs and boots protected from the weather. The REI Half Dome was the same tent I used when I biked the Cowboy Trail from Norfolk to Valentine two years ago (read about it in the May 2015 issue).

Backpacking tents are also great for camping in areas that allow dispersed camping – camping outside of designated campsites. Public areas such as Indian Cave State Park, Fort Robinson State Park, adjacent Soldier Creek Wilderness, Nebraska National Forest at Halsey, Oglala National Grassland, and Samuel R. McKelvie National Forest, with their many miles of trails, offer campers a chance to really get away from the crowd.

Also consider these other brands: Big Agnes, Marmot, The North Face, Cabela's and Eureka, to name a few. Whichever tent you choose, however, remember that a trusty backpacking tent is an investment. Read many

reviews and if making a big purchase, buy from retailers that offer 100 percent satisfaction or lifetime guarantee, which has become the standard.

COMFORTABLE SLEEPING

A sleeping pad is essential – not only does it provide cushion, but it also helps to insulate you from the cold ground regardless of how comfortable the air temperature feels. The type you should buy depends on the kind of camping you plan on doing.

Foam pads are less expensive, lightweight and low maintenance, but tend to be stiff and uncomfortable. Air pads have come a long way for backpacking: they're light and packable, but they can puncture – although a patch kit can easily take care of that – and they are generally more expensive. Self-inflating sleeping pads are a combination between open-cell foam insulation and air; they are more comfortable than foam pads and more durable than air pads, but they are also heavier, less packable and can still puncture. I recommend Therm-A-Rest when looking for a sleeping pad.

As a young backpacker, I used to scoff at people who brought their giant inflatable mattresses to car camp. I rolled my eyes at the loud, obnoxious sound of an electric air pump groaning from the next campsite over, which dared disturb my peace and quiet. Now – not so much. Last year, I broke down and bought a SoundAsleep Camping Series Air Mattress (MSRP \$134.95) on Amazon, and it has made camping so much more enjoyable and comfortable. It's a breeze inflating and deflating, and has helped me sleep through the night.

I own several sleeping bags: a combination of rectangular, mummy, single, double, synthetic-filled, down-filled, cotton-lined and polyester-lined. Which one you choose will depend on your personal preference, the time of year and your activity level. Synthetic-filled bags are the most commonly used, as they are less expensive and can provide insulation even when wet. While down-filled bags are lighter, highly compressible and provide better insulation, you'll pay for it. Down-filled bags are also useless when wet. When choosing a sleeping bag, keep in mind that comfort ratings are subjective – some people run hotter and others colder. Read plenty of reviews.

For three-season camping, my fiancé, Rick, and I usually use The North Face Dolomite Double 20F Degree Synthetic Sleeping Bag (MSRP \$159), which provides just enough warmth and room for two adults. And in warmer weather, I prefer our cotton-lined Coleman bags because polyester lining, while breathable, can get sticky in muggy weather.

For cold, late-November deer camping, I take my mummy, down-filled REI Sub Kilo +15F Sleeping Bag, which features 750-fill goose down and a thick hood for warmth. Rick also has the same bag, except it's cut for a man. Because mummy bags are constructed to maximize warmth by eliminating as much dead space as possible, they are more constrictive compared to rectangular bags. Less



Tent camping in the fall at Indian Cave State Park.

expensive synthetic-filled mummy bags are also available.

A couple notes on caring for sleeping bags: after camping, air out your sleeping bag to prevent molding and loosely store in a large bag or container to maintain loft, which will prolong your sleeping bag's insulating capabilities. Never store a sleeping bag long term inside a compression sack.

KITCHEN AND MEALS

Rick and I eat quite well when we camp, but there's always that fear of forgetting a knife, spatula or tongs at home. We remedy this by designating kitchen items specific for camping – mostly old kitchen tools that we don't use anymore – stored in a special plastic tub that is labeled "Kitchen Camping." When we're ready to camp, we go through the contents with a checklist and just pack it into the car. Your needs will depend on what kind of food you like to cook. It may take a few campouts to whittle down or add to your list for the perfect camp kitchen.

We like to cook dishes that are quick to make and dirty as few pots and pans as possible, and we prefer non-stick



Above: Backpacking tents used at Long Pine State Recreation Area during a cross country bike trip on the Cowboy Recreation and Nature Trail. Below: Hash made with canned potatoes, eggs, bacon and green onion is an easy one-skillet meal for breakfast.



cookware for easy cleaning. Steaks, salads, dehydrated mashed potatoes, breakfast hash, foil packet dinners, hamburgers, hotdogs, sandwiches, pasta, etc., are popular with us.

A few other notable items include Campsuds soap – biodegradable and works in cold, hot and salt water; a Camp Chef 9 piece knife set – packs neatly, includes all the cutlery you will need and a cutting board; and a Coleman two-burner propane stove – a dependable workhorse in our outdoor kitchen.

Food safety is always critical, especially when camping, so keep hand sanitizer gel and wipes available. Disposable cutting board sheets are also great for preparing risky meats such as chicken.

While on the expensive and heavy side, we like our RTIC coolers, which have dramatically cut down the amount of ice we have to buy and replace during warm weekends. And if you plan on venturing out to camp in other states – which I sincerely hope you do – the coolers are also bear proof.

For minimalist camping, I recommend Mountain House or Backpacker’s Pantry freeze dried food; the MSR Pocket Rocket backpacking stove; a GSI Outdoors, MSR or Mountain Summit Gear backpacker cookset; and a portable spice rack container. In bear country, you may be required to carry food in bear-resistant canisters. And a good pocket knife will have countless uses.



Children play in a tent at Ponca State Park's Missouri River Outdoor Expo.

BECOMING AN OUTDOORS-FAMILY

Few families will fondly remember the times they’ve sat around a television, but they will remember sitting around a campfire telling stories, laughing and burning marshmallows. For a few days, tent camping offers the humbling opportunity to live by nature’s terms. And for a group of people, it offers the opportunity to bond, make fun memories, see new sights and learn new skills. It’s something that you, your significant other, children or friends will share forever.

The possibilities are endless. Today, Two Rivers State Recreation Area. Tomorrow, Yellowstone, the Grand Teton or Mount Whitney. As a lifelong camper, I know that I’ll never run out of places to go, things to see and adventures to share. ■

With outdoor skills, only so much book knowledge can replace practical knowledge. If you’d like more guidance, look to the Commission’s Becoming an Outdoors-Family program for hands-on outdoor skills workshops: OutdoorNebraska.org/bof.

CAMPING CHECKLIST

Personalize this list according to your needs. But remember that it’s better to be safe than sorry.

Camp Essentials

- Tent (with stakes and guylines)
- Tent footprint
- Tent repair kit
- Sleeping bags (with optional liners)
- Sleeping pads/air mattresses with pump/cots and repair kits
- Pillows
- Multi-tool or knife
- Folding chairs
- Folding table
- Mallet or hammer for tent stakes
- Headlamps/flashlights with extra batteries
- Lanterns with mantles, fuel and/or batteries
- Duct tape
- Bottle opener and corkscrew
- Can opener
- Recipes
- Marshmallow/hotdog roasting sticks
- Food-storage containers/storage bags
- Trash bags
- Tablecloth and clips (or tape)
- Coolers and ice
- Drinking water
- Plates, bowls, mixing bowls
- Mugs/cups
- Measuring cups and spoons
- Eating utensils
- Knives, cutting board, spatula and whisk

Clothes

- Moisture-wicking clothing and underwear
- Sun-shielding hats
- Swimsuits
- Boots or shoes suited to terrain
- Socks (synthetic or wool)
- Sleepwear
- Insulating outerwear if needed
- Gloves or mittens
- Rainwear (jacket and pants)
- Clothesline with clips
- Water sandals/shoes
- In-camp sandals or booties
- Foil
- Egg holder
- Biodegradable soap
- Pot scrubber/sponge
- Portable or standing camp sink
- Quick-dry towels

Personal Items

- Toilet paper
- Sunscreen, lip balm and insect repellent
- Hand sanitizer and antiseptic wipes
- Spare eyeglasses/contact lenses
- Mirror
- First-aid kit
- Prescription medications
- Toiletry kit: toothbrush, toothpaste, brush/comb, soap, cosmetics, etc.

Kitchen

- Stove with windscreen and fuel
- Matches or lighter
- Charcoal with fire starter
- Firewood (if allowed – see page 21)
- Grill rack
- Frying pan
- Cook pots
- Pot grabber
- Dutch oven
- Portable coffee maker

Other Items

- Camera/camcorder with memory cards
- Park permits
- Campsite reservation confirmation
- Compass and maps
- Field guidebooks
- Pet essentials
- Games/toys
- Books or magazines

Time Well Spent

What to Do in June

By Renae Blum

June is a busy month. The fishing is great, camping season is in full swing and there's lots to do looking ahead to the fall hunting seasons. Here are a few additional ideas to keep you going. For a full list of this month's events across the state or for more information on any of the activities listed here, visit OutdoorNebraska.org. ■



PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER

Rock Creek Trail Days

June 3-4

Rock Creek Station State Historical Park

Get a peek at the inner workings of a mid-19th century Nebraska stage and Pony Express station during Rock Creek Trail Days, held the first weekend in June. Living history interpreters will reenact the bloody skirmish that helped earn "Wild Bill" Hickok his name, and demonstrate activities such as flint knapping, blacksmithing and hawk throwing. A buffalo stew cookout will be held on Saturday. Tickets are available until noon on June 2 at the Fairbury Chamber of Commerce and at the Rock Creek Station Visitor Center on Saturday.

Family Fishing Nights

Throughout the month

Statewide

If your family is new to fishing, come out for Family Fishing Nights! These free events are designed to make fishing fun and rewarding for newcomers of all ages. Rods and reels, as well as bait and fishing instruction, will be available for free. Visit OutdoorNebraska.org/familyfishing for dates and locations.



PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER

PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER



Father's Day Weekend at a Park

June 17-18

Statewide

State parks are a great place to celebrate Father's Day. Try grilling by the lake, swimming at a park pool, taking a camping or fishing trip, or going boating. Several parks, including Fort Robinson, Platte River and Eugene T. Mahoney state parks, are offering special buffets and menus.

Photographing Wildflowers

Throughout the month

Statewide

A variety of wildflowers are blooming across the state, such as black-eyed Susan, pale purple coneflower, purple spiderwort, common milkweed, shell leaf penstemon and ox-eye daisy. As for where to go: In eastern Nebraska, visit Indian Cave State Park, Rock Creek Station State Historical Park and Fort Atkinson State Historical Park. Calamus State Recreation Area is a good bet in central Nebraska; in the west, visit Wildcat Hills State Recreation Area.

Nebraska Sesquicentennial Events

Throughout the month

Statewide

Celebrate Nebraska's 150th this month by enjoying festivals in Omaha, Dannebrog, Blair, Papillion, North Platte, Holdrege, Cortland, Beatrice and Crofton. Attractions at the various events include parades, live music, activities for kids, local food and more. Also, don't miss Ash Hollow State Historical Park's Pageant on June 16-17, with live music and performances celebrating the stories of travelers on the Oregon-California Trail. See the calendar at ne150.org for details on these and other events.



PHOTO BY JEFF KURBUS

A Celebration of Conservation

By Jon Farrar and Eric Fowler

2017 marks the 150th anniversary of Nebraska becoming a state. For most of that period, the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission has worked to conserve the state's natural resources, continuing the work that some started even before statehood.



Long before Nebraska became a state in 1867, the people who lived here had an innate appreciation for the state's fish, wildlife and other natural resources. For Native Americans, fur traders and early settlers, this abundant fish and game provided sustenance in a land that was sometimes harsh. Some speculate settlers would not have survived without it.

The utilitarian nature of those first settlers nearly wiped out many wildlife species. The plow played its part, too, converting wildlife habitat to cropland. Elsewhere in the U.S., logging was destroying forests. It is in these events in American history that the conservation movement was born in the 19th century, and where the roots of the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission can be found.

As Nebraska was settled and man no longer relied so heavily on game and fish to survive, his appreciation of the state's natural resources shifted from one of utility and sustenance to enjoyment and appreciation. In their free time, Nebraska hunted and fished for fun and relaxation as much as they did for food. They swam and boated in the lakes and

rivers in the summers. And they sought out wild and scenic places to do these things, to camp, or to simply visit for a Sunday picnic. They wanted to ensure there would always be wild things, including game to hunt and fish to catch, and that wild places were preserved that all could enjoy.

From its beginnings with the formation of the Fish Commission in 1879, the Game and Parks Commission's involvement in the conservation of these resources grew to what it is today. The agency's mission is simple: Stewardship of the state's fish, wildlife, park, and outdoor recreation resources in the best long-term interests of the people and those resources.

The methods the Commission uses has changed drastically since its early days. Fisheries management has shifted from purely stocking to scientific sampling and monitoring of fish populations and improving fish habitat in Nebraska waters, both new and old. Wildlife management that once only used hunting seasons and limits to manage wildlife now uses science to study it, surveys to monitor it and set seasons, and focuses on habitat work to maintain or expand populations,

with work focusing more on non-game species than ever before. In the parks, where once simply providing a place to go was sufficient, the Commission is now expanding amenities and activities to enhance visitors' experiences. Decades ago, the duties of conservation officers began to shift from purely law enforcement to education and public relations. Educating Nebraskans on the importance and value of the natural resources, and teaching them how to enjoy them, is a growing component of completing the mission.

In a land with such a diversity of landscapes, fish, wildlife and plant species, it is a noble and worthy mission, one that the people of the Commission are proud to uphold.

What follows is the history of resource management in Nebraska.

1859 – Territorial legislature passed laws restricting hunting and limiting weapons.

1860 – The Council and House of Representatives of the Territory of Nebraska set the first seasons for deer, elk, turkey, quail, grouse and woodcock. As wildlife declined, other species were added and seasons became more restrictive. Yet it would be 40 years before state legislators provided for enforcement of game and fish laws.

1873 – The first documented fish stocking in Nebraska occurred by accident when a west-bound train derailed on the Elkhorn River near Fremont, dumping a car carrying 300,000 fish.

1875 – Game laws were amended to protect the wild bison with a closed season, the same year



Enforcing game and fish laws was the primary responsibility of the Commission in its early years. By 1933, when these game wardens posed for a photo, the agency employed 18 game wardens in 15 districts across the state.

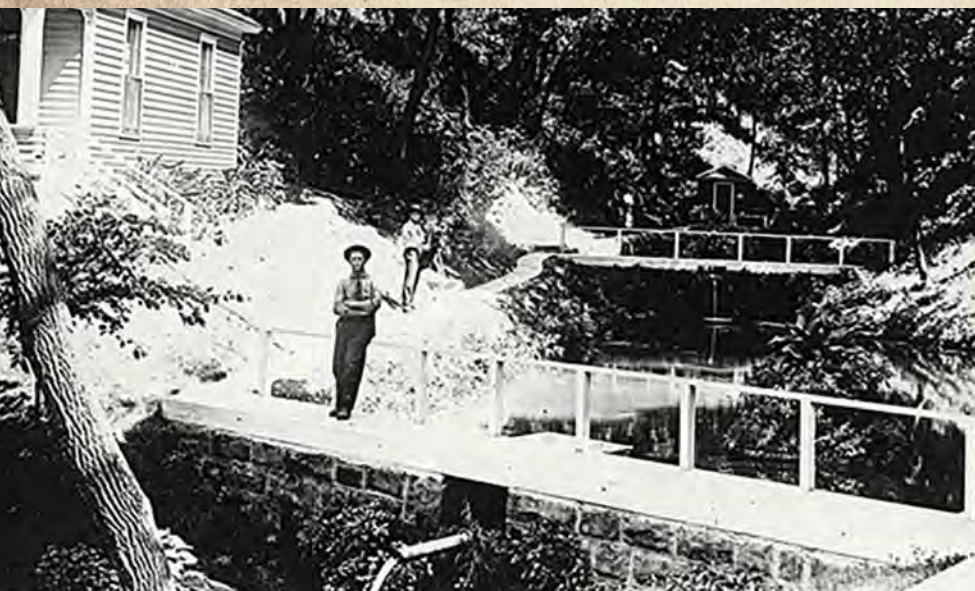
the once abundant animal was nearly extirpated from the state.

Legislature passed a bill creating the three-man Fish Commission.

become the Gretna Fish Hatchery, and later, part of Schramm Park SRA, and began raising and stocking fish in waters throughout the state. This included German carp, which “will be the most successfully cultivated of any fish adapted

1879 – The Nebraska

1881 – The Commission purchased what would



The Romaine and Decker fish hatchery was already in operation when the Nebraska Fish Commission was created in 1879. The Commission purchased the hatchery, complete with canyon ponds, in 1881 and renamed it the Gretna Fish Hatchery. It is now part of Schramm Park State Recreation Area.

Game laws protected the American bison by closing the season in 1875 – just before they were nearly wiped out by over-hunting and shooting.



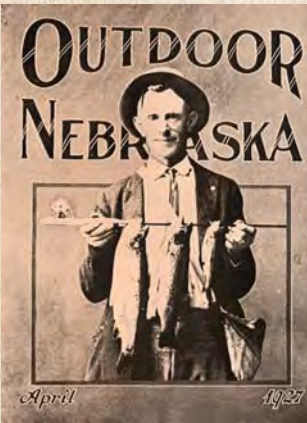
to our waters” and touted as the “poor man’s fish of the future” for the food it would provide. By the time the Game and Fish Commission was formed in 1901, efforts were already being made to eradicate the fish, which muddies our waters, work that continues today. Hatcheries were later established at Valentine, Rock Creek near Parks, Benkleman, Crawford, North Platte, Grove Trout Rearing Station near Royal, and Calamus Reservoir. All but two, Benkleman and Crawford, remain in operation.

1881 – Song birds were protected and another law made it illegal to kill birds with anything other than a shoulder mounted gun.

1896 – It became illegal to hunt another man’s land without permission.

1901 – The first fishing regulations in the state were passed. Trout season ran June through October

with an 8-inch minimum, and daily bag limits on fish were set at 25. Seasons were added for bass and other species throughout the years. With the exception of paddlefish seasons on the Missouri River, fishing has been open year-round for all species since 1946.



The first issue of *Outdoor Nebraska*, the precursor to *NEBRASKAland Magazine*, was published in 1926. Like this 1927 issue, above, it was 16 pages plus the cover.

1901 – Deer and pronghorn hunting seasons ran from August 15 to

November 15, even though it was estimated there were only 50 deer and 100 pronghorns in the state, and waterfowl hunting season ran from September 1 to April 15.

1901 – In the same act that created the Commission, for the first time in Nebraska history, the legislature placed restrictions on the taking of fish and game and provided funding for four full-time employees. In addition, 88 “special deputy wardens” served without compensation to “report status of fish and game, and violations” in their areas. In later years, the special wardens were paid half of any fines imposed as a result of their work.

1901 – Nebraskans hunting or fishing outside of the county in which they resided were required to buy a \$1 permit. In 1911 “female persons” and boys under the age of 18 when fishing, and boys under the age of 18 when hunting with a parent or guardian, were exempted

from a license. In 1921, all persons over age 16 were required to have a license, regardless of where they lived, hunted or fished.

1905 – For the first time, state statutes prohibited the taking of fish in any public water, except the Missouri River, by means other than hook and line.

1905 – Pheasants were stocked by private individuals and were protected, as were all species of native squirrels. The Commission purchased its first breeding stock of pheasants in 1911.

1905 – Wolves, coyotes, foxes, wild cats, skunks and rabbits could be killed at any time of the year. Daily bag limits allowed 10 geese, 50 ducks and 50 “other birds.”

1907 – The legislature provided full protection for deer, elk, pronghorn and beaver, closing the season on all.



Canada geese were abundant in the early 1900s and hunters took advantage. In this 1908 photo, Albert Schatz, Jack Stack, driver in background, Keith Neville, Governor of Nebraska from 1917-1919, A. P. Kelly, and Henry Rassmussen show off the 29 Canada geese they took on a hunt on the North Platte River between Sutherland and Paxton.

1913 – Passage of the federal Migratory Waterfowl Act prohibited spring waterfowl hunting. The federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918 provided additional protection.

1917 – Soon after World War I was declared, at the request of the National Food Administration, the Commission established a seining crew to harvest fish to help feed the nation. In the first 18 months, the crew seined 125,000 pounds of carp and buffalo fish, which were sold for one or two cents per pound. The crew was disbanded in 1971.

1919 – The Game and Fish Commission became a division of the newly created state Department of Agriculture, which aimed to make abundant fish and fowl an important source of food, just as corn and cattle.

1919 – All school sections in the state were declared game and bird reserves.

1921 – The agency was reorganized as the more independent Bureau of Game and Fish within the Department of Ag.

1921 – The legislature created the State Park Board within the Department of Public Works, and set aside one section of school land in the Pine Ridge for Chadron State Park. By 1930, the park had 10 cabins and a swimming pool.

1921 – Laws were revised to allow fishing through ice, which to that time was prohibited, for all species except trout and pike.

1923 – Arbor Lodge, the mansion and grounds of J. Sterling Morton in Nebraska City, and Victoria Springs, the log home and

store of Judge Matthews near Anselmo, were added to the state park system. Arbor Lodge later became a State Historical Park, nine more of which were added: Fort Kearny, Fort Hartsuff, Fort Atkinson, Buffalo Bill Ranch, Champion Mill, Bowring Ranch, Ash Hollow, Rock Creek Station and Ashfall Fossil Beds.

1925 – The Bureau began to establish a statewide system of recreation grounds to supplement the state parks. In 1925 and 1926, recreation areas were acquired at Goose Lake, Walgren Lake, Rat and Beaver lakes and Fremont Sandpits “to provide fishing and hunting for the thousands of Nebraska citizens who desire such outdoor recreation.”

1926 – First issue of *Outdoor Nebraska*, precursor to *NEBRASKAland*

Magazine, was published.

1927 – The grouse bag limit was reduced to five, ducks to 20 and geese five.

1927 – Bag and size limits were established for game fish and heavy fines imposed for the use of nets or traps to catch fish.

1927 – All fees received by the Bureau from sale of permits were directed to funding the fish and wildlife department, making the Bureau self-supporting.

1927 – Hunting from an auto was prohibited.

1927 – A three-day pheasant season, Nebraska’s first, opened in October in Wheeler and parts of Sherman counties. In 1928, a 10-day season was held in nine central Nebraska counties.



Judge Charles Mathews, seated, claimed his homestead next to spring-fed Victoria Creek. He built two log buildings in 1873, one for his home, which would later become Custer County’s first post office, and the other a store, and bottled and sold the spring water. In 1923, Victoria Springs was added to the state park system, and the buildings still stand today at the SRA near Merna.



NGPC LIBRARY ARCHIVES

From 1958 through 1962, 1,077 pronghorns trapped in Colorado were released in the Sandhills, restoring the species to its native range.

1929 – The State Park Board was dissolved and merged with the Bureau of Game and Fish to create the Game, Forestation and Parks Commission. The legislation provided that the governor should appoint five commissioners according to districts to serve as the policy-setting board of the agency. The number of commissioners was later

increased to seven and now stands at nine.

1929 – In addition to the Chief Warden and a Special Investigator, there were 15 district wardens and additional special deputy wardens serving principally as eyes and ears for the district wardens. District wardens were issued uniforms and furnished with “small automobiles” and camping equipment so they could live in the field when required.

1930 – The Commission began its first fisheries research project: an investigation of the aquatic plant and insects in Cherry County lakes. The agency didn’t hire its first fisheries biologist until 1943.

1930 – The Commission began its first wildlife research project: a study of the food habits of the ring-necked pheasant in central Nebraska.

1930 – The hunting season on prairie grouse was closed and would not reopen until 1950.

1930 – The Commission purchased land near Scotts Bluff to create a “big game reserve” today known as the Wildcat Hills State Recreation Area.

1933 – The Commission had established 26 state recreation areas.

1934 – Because of the drought, seining crews salvaged an estimated 1 million game fish from drying waters throughout the state and stocked them in other suitable lakes and streams. Additionally, 118,000 pounds of rough fish were sold and the revenue used to fund future operations.

1935 – Niobrara State Park at the mouth of the Niobrara River opened to the public after work by the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) in 1934 and 1935.

1936 – Ponca State Park along the Missouri River in Dixon County was created with the donation of 200 acres from area residents and developed almost entirely with federal funds through the Civilian Conservation Corps.

1937 – The Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Act, better known as the Pittman-Robertson Act, was passed by Congress establishing an 11 percent manufacturer’s excise tax on sporting rifles, shotguns, ammunition, and archery equipment, and a 10 percent tax on handguns. Revenues from the tax are still distributed to state conservation departments to help support wildlife research and management.

1940 – Separate hunting and fishing permits were issued for the first time,



Separate hunting and fishing licenses were not available until 1940.

with either costing \$1 and a combination permit \$1.50.

1944 – A 10-day quail season was allowed in four southeastern Nebraska counties, the first since 1918.

1945 – Deer had become so abundant on the Bessey Ranger District of the Nebraska National Forest near Halsey that a December “experimental season” was allowed. It was the first since the season for deer was closed by the legislature in 1907.

1945 – The Commission began operating Lake McConaughy and other reservoirs in Central Nebraska Public Power and Irrigation District’s new irrigation system as state recreation areas.

1949 – Nebraska’s second deer season since 1906 was held in the Pine Ridge. There has been a deer hunting season in every year since, and statewide hunting since 1961.

1950 – The Dingell-Johnson Act created the Sport Fish Restoration Program by establishing an excise tax on fishing equipment. The tax, collected by the federal government, is reallocated to the states to enhance sport fisheries.

1953 – Nebraska held its first open season on pronghorns since 1906 in a portion of Cheyenne County.

1954 – Research was initiated on what would be one of the Commission’s most ambitious research projects: The Life History and Ecology of the Ring-necked Pheasant in Nebraska. Field work for the project would not be completed until 1965.

1957 – The Commission opened what would in 1962 become Fort Robinson State Park to the public on the site of what had been an active military fort from 1874 to 1948.

1958 – Pronghorns trapped in Colorado were released in north-central counties in January to re-establish herds once native to the Sandhills. From 1958 through 1962, 1,077 pronghorns were released.

1958 – 28 Merriam’s wild turkeys obtained from Wyoming and South Dakota were released in the Deadman’s Creek drainage

in Dawes County and the Cottonwood Creek drainage in Sioux County.

1958 – The Commission began requiring a \$1 State Recreation Areas stamp for vehicles entering the parks, its first foray into a user-pay system similar to that required of hunters and anglers. The stamp, which funded park improvements and maintenance, was issued for 3 years.

1959 – The Legislature approved a bill that creates the Division of State Parks within the Commission. The bill also established the State Park Fund and a special mill levy that would collect 1.3 cents for every \$100 in assessed taxable property value from 1959 through 1968 to fund the development and maintenance of the park system, replacing the SRA sticker and the general fund appropriation and spurring major projects in the parks.

1959 – Assigned boating safety responsibilities by the legislature, the Commission began issuing licenses for



NGPC LIBRARY ARCHIVES

A hunter poses with a trophy mule deer he harvested in the 1949 season in the Pine Ridge, the second in the state since 1906.

motorized boats.

1958 – The Commission took on management responsibilities and began developing facilities for fishing, hunting and recreation at Lewis and Clark Lake, the Missouri River reservoir formed by Gavins Point Dam, which had been completed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in 1957.

1961 – Game wardens became known as conservation officers.

1962 – The first turkey hunting season in Nebraska was held in the Pine Ridge. The state’s first spring turkey season came in 1964.

1963 – Indian Cave State Park was established in the wooded bluffs along the

Missouri River.

1964 – The Commission began developing recreation facilities at Bureau of Reclamation reservoirs, including Merritt, Enders, Box Butte, Medicine Creek, Red Willow, Sherman and Swanson, that were leased to the Commission for recreational development. Lake Minatare had been added in 1960 and, in 1983, Calamus was included. It also began work on facilities at the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers’ Salt Valley reservoirs near Lincoln, including Branched Oak Lake.

1964 – The name of the monthly magazine was changed from *Outdoor Nebraska* to *NEBRASKAland*.



NGPC LIBRARY ARCHIVES

Dr. and Mrs. Wanek of North Platte show off their catch in 1934.



NGPC LIBRARY ARCHIVES

Fort Robinson State Park stagecoach. Circa late 1950s to early 1960s. Photographer unknown.



Canada geese raised at Sacramento-Wilcox Wildlife Management Area near Holdrege were used to restore nesting populations in the Sandhills and elsewhere between 1983 and 1997.

1964 – The first modern-day pronghorn hunting season was held in the Sandhills.

1966 – A Master Angler Award program was created to acknowledge large fish caught by Nebraska anglers.

1967 – The legislature removed the responsibility for forestation from the Commission, which was renamed the Game and Parks Commission.

1967 – Elk began wandering into the Pine Ridge, where the state's first resident herd in modern history became established southeast of Chadron.

1969 – Enrollment in the Acres for Wildlife program began to encourage farmers and ranchers to protect small plots of wildlife habitat.

1970 – The Commission initiated a program to re-establish breeding populations of Canada geese in the Sandhills. By 1983, when the Sandhills

portion of the project was completed, 4,100 birds had been released. Dark goose hunting in the region, which had closed in 1969, resumed in 1980. The successful program continued elsewhere in the state until 1997, when the captive flock of Canada geese at the Sacramento-Wilcox Wildlife Management Area was disbanded.

1970 – What would become the Cornhusker Trap Shoot began. The Commission became a sponsor of the event in 1972 and has run it since 1987. Now the largest shoot of its kind in the nation, it draws about 2,500 middle and high school students from Nebraska and surrounding states.

1972 – The Legislature provided for fee-exempt hunting and fishing permits for veterans 65 and older or anyone over 70 years of age.

1973 – Sixteen bison were moved from Wildcat Hills State Recreation Area to

start a herd at Fort Robinson State Park.

1974 – The Gretna fish hatchery, the state's first, acquired in 1881, was closed. The grounds are now a museum at Schramm Park State Recreation Area.

1974 – The Legislature passed a law requiring all hunters born in 1977 or later

pass a Hunter Education class before hunting. Bowhunter Education was added in 1993. Volunteer instructors, the backbone of the program, teach students to be safe, respectful and responsible hunters, reducing hunting accidents and fatalities. In 2016, about 600 volunteers donated 8,400 hours to teach 288 classes and certify 4,167 students.

1975 – The Legislature enacted the Nongame and Endangered Species Act, declaring that it is in the public interest "to preserve, protect, perpetuate, and enhance" all species in the state. Under this act, species becoming rare within the state receive protection, as well as those included on the national threatened and endangered species lists.

1975 – Dove hunting season opened statewide. There had been no season since 1953 when the legislature reclassified the dove as a songbird.

1976 – A five-day



The reintroduction of bighorn sheep, extirpated from Nebraska by 1900, began with the release of six sheep into a pen at Fort Robinson in 1981. Other releases brought sheep from other states to the Pine Ridge and Wildcat Hills, and in 2012, 41 sheep trapped in Alberta, Canada, were released north of Harrison.

muzzleloading rifle deer hunting season was held on DeSoto National Wildlife Refuge, the first black powder hunting season in the state's history. A statewide muzzleloader season began in 1989.

1977 – As recommended by the 1975 Habitat Conference, a cooperative effort between sportsmen's groups, the Commission and other agencies, Nebraska's first Habitat Stamp was issued. The \$7.50 stamp replaced the Upland Game Stamp and provided funding to manage habitat on public and private land and acquire wildlife management areas.

1978 – A park-entry permit program, authorized by the legislature in 1976, was initiated to raise funds for improvement and maintenance of state parks.

1979 – The Ak-Sar-Ben Aquarium opened at the site of the old Gretna fish hatchery in Schramm SRA. The educational facility has hosted countless programs for adults and school children since.

1981 – With the support of the North American Wild Sheep Foundation and the Nebraska chapter of the Safari Club International, the Commission released six bighorn sheep in an enclosure on the buttes at Fort Robinson State Park to establish a resident herd. Some of those sheep and their progeny were released to the wild in 1988 and the enclosure was removed entirely in 1991. Boosted by the relocation of sheep from Colorado, Montana and Canada in 2001, 2005, 2007 and 2012, the state now has about 320 sheep in the Pine Ridge and the Wildcat Hills.

1982 – Platte River State Park officially opened in the bluffs above the river for which it was named.

1983 – The Nebraska Game and Parks Foundation was created to help develop private/public partnerships that have generated tens of millions of dollars in donations to enhance and improve Nebraska's natural, cultural and recreational resources and help the Commission further its mission.

1984 – The Nebraska Wildlife Conservation Fund was created, allowing citizens to donate all or part of their state income tax refund or make a direct tax-deductible donation to help fund projects to benefit nongame species.

1984 – New legislation allowed the Commission and natural resource districts to obtain instream-flow rights in Nebraska rivers and streams to conserve water for fish, wildlife and recreation. The first-ever water right granted to protect fisheries came in 1989 on Long Pine Creek. In 1998, rights were granted to protect fish and wildlife habitat in 250 miles of the central and lower Platte River.

1984 – A \$5 Trout Stamp was required to harvest trout.

1985 – The Commission launched Project Wild in Nebraska. The national program trains educators to teach kindergarten through high school students about wildlife and natural resources. The Commission has since started other educational endeavors aimed at youths and adults, including *Trail*



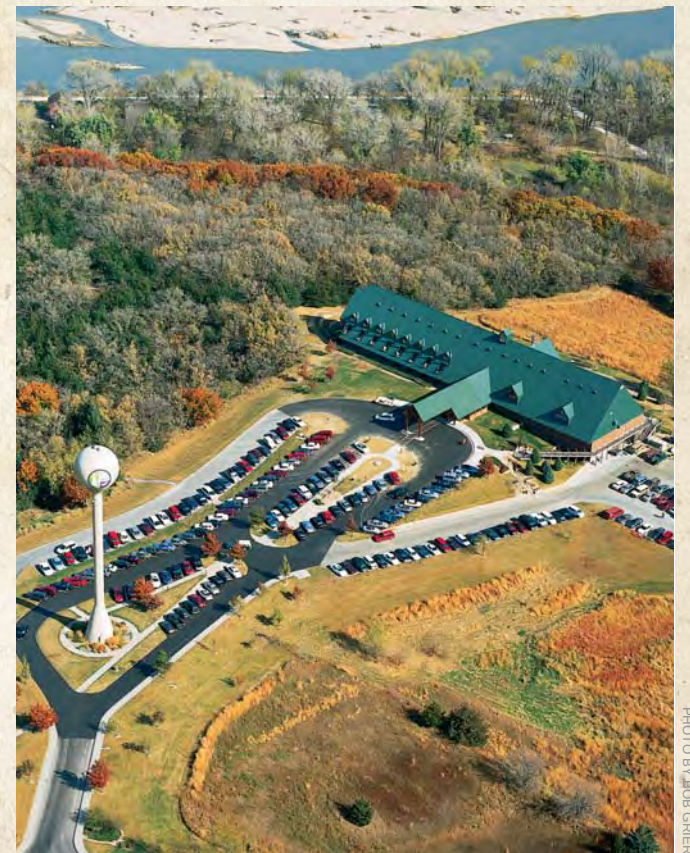
In 1984, the Nebraska Wildlife Tax Checkoff was created, helping fund projects benefitting nongame species, including one that brought peregrine falcons to the Woodmen Tower in Omaha.

Tales Magazine, Aquatic Education, Becoming an Outdoors-Woman workshops, Outdoor Skills Camps, Fishing in Nebraska Schools and many more.

1985 – Land was acquired for the new Niobrara State Park. The old park site,

acquired in 1930, was abandoned because of rising water levels caused by the creation of Lewis and Clark Lake. The new park opened in 1987.

1986 – Purchase of land and development of Eugene T. Mahoney State Park in



Significant private donations raised by the Nebraska Game and Parks Foundation helped build the ultra-modern Eugene T. Mahoney State Park between Lincoln and Omaha.



PHOTO BY JENNY NGUYEN

The Cowboy Recreation and Nature Trail, an abandoned Chicago & North Western rail line, was given to the Commission in 1994. It has been developed from Norfolk to Valentine, where it crosses the Niobrara River on an old railroad bridge.

Cass County began. The park, funded in large part by private donations, opened in 1991.

1986 – Nebraska's first modern-day elk season was held in the Pine Ridge. Seasons have been held annually since 1995.

1991 – The first confirmed reports of a mountain lion since the 19th century came from tracks found near Crawford. Soon after, an adult lion was shot by a hunter near Harrison. Lions continue to find their way into Nebraska from neighboring states and have

established resident breeding populations, leading to the state's first lion hunting season in 2014.

1991 – Bald eagles successfully nested in Nebraska for the first time in decades, part of a recovery that began in the 1970s

following the ban of many chemicals that decimated populations of our nation's symbol, and protection from the Endangered Species Act. Expanding populations here and elsewhere allowed the bird to be removed from the endangered species list in 2007. In 2016, there were a record 159 active eagle nests in the state.

1992 – Smith Falls State Park, the site of the state's highest waterfall, was established on the Niobrara River near Valentine.

1992 – Commercial harvesting of catfish in the Missouri River was discontinued.

1993 – The Belmont fish ladder was completed on the North Platte River near Bridgeport, the first fish-passage structure placed on any Nebraska stream.

1994 – A gift from the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy of 321 miles of abandoned Chicago & North Western rail line across northern

Nebraska lead to creation of the Cowboy Recreation and Nature Trail. When completed, it will be the longest rails-to-trails conversion in the country.

1994 – The Commission became the first state game, fish and parks agency in the country to launch a website.

1997 – Nebraska anglers were required to purchase an Aquatic Habitat Stamp, the first of its kind in the nation, to help rehabilitate and enhance aquatic habitat in lakes and streams. The Aquatic Habitat Program has since spent \$62 million, including funding from 71 partners, to improve aquatic habitat on 96 Nebraska waters.

1997 – The Commission launched the CRP-MAP program, which paid landowners to open their land enrolled in the federal Conservation Reserve Program to public hunting. The program started with 19,789 acres and has grown into the Open Fields and Waters program, which this year opened 276,000 acres to hunting and 424 acres of private ponds and 41 miles of private streams and rivers to fishing.

1997 – The Commission began stocking endangered pallid sturgeon in the lower Platte River as part of a national recovery plan. The agency's involvement in the fish, listed as endangered in 1990, continues through its intensive broodstock collection program in the Missouri River.

1998 – Two permits were issued for Nebraska's first bighorn sheep hunting season. By 2016, 21 permits had been issued by lottery or

auction in all but five years since, raising \$1.2 million for the sheep program.

2002 – The Commission launched its Focus on Pheasants Program, a cooperative effort with Pheasants Forever and others aimed at improving habitat for the upland game bird and other wildlife on public and private land.

2005 – The Nebraska Natural Legacy Project, Nebraska's version of the Statewide Wildlife Action Plan required by the U.S. Congress, was initiated. The project targeted habitat management for at-risk species through partnerships and became a major part of conservation in the state.

2005 – The first Missouri River Outdoor Expo was held at Ponca State Park, offering hands-on activities featuring outdoor education, sports and recreation, with one day for fifth graders and two for anyone. The free event is now the largest in the Midwest, drawing more than 50,000 people annually. It spawned similar Commission expos at Fort Kearny and the Wildcat Hills state recreation areas, and at Platte River State Park for school children.

2010 – The Commission launched its Angler Access Program, an offshoot of the Aquatic Habitat Program, to improve access and fishing success for bank anglers. By 2016, \$6 million had been spent on projects at 52 waters.

2011 – The Roger G. Sykes Outdoor Heritage Complex, the Commission's first shooting range, opened at Platte River State Park, offering archery, air rifle,



PHOTO BY MIKE FORSBERG

The Commission began stocking endangered pallid sturgeon in the Platte River in 1997, one of many efforts that focuses on rare or threatened species.

firearm and shotgun ranges. A similar range opened in 2016 at the Wildcat Hills SRA.

2014 – The Nebraska Outdoor Education Center, an indoor archery and firearm range, opened in Lincoln.

2014 – The Commission also opened its Outdoor Encounter exhibit at the Nebraska State Fair, continuing a presence at the state fair that dates to at least 1900.

2015 – The Commission, in conjunction with the Nebraska Game and Parks Foundation, launched the Venture Parks Complex, which will expand programs and amenities at Mahoney and Platte River state parks and Schramm and Louisville state recreation areas to form a recreation destination. Construction on the multi-year-project will begin in 2017.

2016 – The Commission adopted the Cool Water Stream Management plan to guide stewardship of streams and ensure they will support productive and sustainable populations of cool water aquatic life, have healthy riparian zones and clean water, and contribute to watershed stability.

2016 - The Commission launched its Berggren Plan, a five-year cooperative effort with other organizations aimed at growing Nebraska's pheasant population and increasing land open to hunting in areas with abundant pheasants, with habitat and hunter access, particularly for youth, as cornerstones. The plan is named for the late Nebraska Game and Parks Commissioner Lynn Berggren. ■



PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER

The Commission's Focus on Pheasants program improved habitat for pheasants, providing more birds for hunters like Fox Lane of Lincoln.



PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER

The Angler Access Program, an offshoot of the Commission's popular Aquatic Habitat Program, is making it easier for people to fish at lakes across the state with projects such as the creation of this fishing deck at Louisville State Recreation Area.

Taking Kids Fishing

...and keeping it simple

By Julie Geiser

With summer in full swing many anglers are heading to lakes and ponds across Nebraska for a great day of fishing. When you venture out, take your kids fishing, too. To keep them interested, make the day fun and adventurous.

Getting Started

Most young kids won't spend all day fishing, so allow time for wading in the water, skipping stones, catching frogs, floating sticks and leaves, playing ball and hide-and-

seek, collecting wild flowers and finding bugs. Join in the fun as well. You may not get much fishing in, but you will have spent quality time in the outdoors and you will spark the interest in your child.

If you already fish, keep the simple basics of fishing in mind when teaching kids. Children who have not fished before will have the most fun and fewer tangles using small, kid-sized rods with spincast reels – you will have fewer problems fixing and untangling them, too. Spincast reels allow casting by releasing a thumb button located on the reel that is simple for kids to use.

Be prepared to tie the knots, bait the hooks and possibly

Spincast Reel

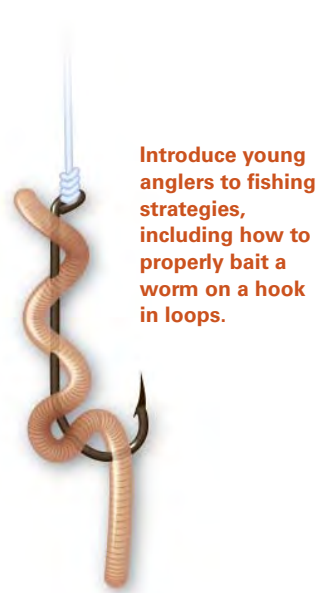


Kids fish at a Carp-O-Rama event at Lake Maloney State Recreation Area in Lincoln County.



PHOTOS BY JULIE GEISER

Dillon Lorensen, left, Paislee Erickson and Lexus Erickson search for bait at a family fishing event at Birdwood Wildlife Management Area in Lincoln County.



Introduce young anglers to fishing strategies, including how to properly bait a worm on a hook in loops.

Lexus Erickson is pictured catching large bluegill out of a small pond. The bluegill were just short of master angler status.



PHOTO BY JULIE GEISER



PHOTO BY DOUG CARROLL

Anglers participate in a Family Fishing Night at Bowling Lake in Lancaster County.



PHOTO BY JULIE GEISER

Barnett Park in Red Willow County sees many visitors with several attractions such as fishing, playground equipment, wildlife, walking, jogging and picnicking.

even make the casts. You may have to take the fish off of the hook when the kids land one, but let them know they can lend a hand at any time. Be sure to let them reel in the fish, as that's the fun part and it is a good learning experience and confidence builder for the future.

Use simple baits – worms, grasshoppers, crickets or minnows on a small hook with a bobber and split-shot weight that are fished on the bottom. These allow the fish to find the bait instead of the repeated casting required when fishing with lures. However, older kids will like to cast and reel; the constant casting and reeling keeps them busy.

To keep kids' attention, fish lakes containing species that are easily caught such as trout, bluegill, crappie, bass and

carp. Then, pack a simple sack lunch, snacks and drinks that can be enjoyed by everyone in the group. An outdoor meal, complete with a blanket for a midday picnic, may just be the most exciting part of the day for a young angler.

Finally, make the trip short if needed. It is better to leave when the kids start to lose interest so they remember the fishing trip as a happy time. Don't have a set time frame. It is better for children to leave wishing they could stay a little longer than for them to wish they had left sooner. These trips will cement relationships and introduce kids to nature, the value of the environment, and the importance of fish and game laws. They will learn about a sport that they can enjoy their entire lives, and you will spend quality time making memories together.

Rules and Ethics

Teaching young anglers to do outdoor activities the correct way makes everyone's outdoor experiences better. The following list will get you started on creating a lifelong, ethical angler.

- Make sure that you have the proper licenses and that you are fishing legally. Read the new fishing rules and regulations in the 2017 Fishing Guide, available online at OutdoorNebraska.org/guides. The fishing guide will give you bag and possession limits, public fishing areas and which fish can be caught at those areas. The guide also provides master angler information and other regulations that may come up when you are fishing.
- If you are going to eat your catch, teach kids size and

bag limits and keep only what you will eat. You can also introduce children to the concept of catch-and-release, which allows fish to live for future fishing fun and teaches them good fishing ethics.

- Instill responsibility by pointing out the importance of not littering. Trash makes for an ugly place to fish and discarded line can snag and kill fish, birds, turtles, small mammals and frogs. Take all your trash out with you or discard it in appropriate trash containers. ■

Be sure to attend one of the Commission's free family fishing events held across the state this year. For a list of these events, visit the Nebraska Game and Parks website at OutdoorNebraska.org.

Mirror Image

By Renae Blum

Tick. Tick. Tick. The seconds pass one after another, and for just a few handfuls of time, the scene stands almost perfectly still.

In the foreground is a man astride a horse, nonchalantly holding up a bottle of something – gin, perhaps? The midday sun paints harsh shadows below him. Behind him is a snaking pathway in the dirt, obviously well-traveled. Crammed up against the path are buildings – a toll bridge cabin, a bunkhouse, a barn – with people arranged in front, turned toward the camera. Off to the left is a full team of horses and a stagecoach.

It is 1860, and the people at Rock Creek Station have come into a bit of luck. A traveling wet plate photographer is here, with all his chemicals and supplies in tow. He arranges the scene, they obediently pose, and afterward, he gets his money, the owner of the place gets a unique keepsake, and life at this busy stage stop resumes.

Now, let's shoot forward 156 years, into August 2016. It's hot. There has

been some complaining about standing in the sun too long. Cody Mobley of Fort McKavett, Texas, has traveled more than 700 miles to Rock Creek Station State Historical Park east of Fairbury, Nebraska, with all his photography supplies in the back of his pickup: batches of chemicals, a

portable darkroom, a handmade wooden camera. He and more than 20 costumed

people, along with a local stagecoach owner, are here to attempt the impossible: recreating the past.

Getting everything and everybody in place takes about half an hour. Mobley and his friends have already spent a considerable amount of time walking around a nearby hill trying to determine where the original photographer was standing when he took the picture. It wasn't easy to find an approximate spot – after all, a lot changes in 156 years.

In its heyday, Rock Creek Station was both a Pony Express station and a stage stop along the Oregon-California



Wet plate photographer
Cody Mobley



This rare 1860 daguerreotype was discovered at the California State Library in Sacramento, and it is the only known photo of Rock Creek Station during its operation.

Trail. Here, mid-19th century travelers of all kinds could stop and rest, and purchase a range of supplies at the ranch store: whiskey, tobacco, flour, sugar, salt pork, coffee, tea and other goods were common offerings. Before it became a road ranch, the area was already popular with travelers such as fur trappers and traders, thanks to its abundant natural grasses for grazing,

the clear waters of Rock Creek, and its shady oaks, cottonwoods and elms. Several people spotted the potential for business here: first, brothers S.C. and Newton Glenn, who set up a humble trading post, and then David McCanles, who is believed to be the horseman pictured in the 1860 photograph. A North Carolina sheriff and military academy graduate, McCanles dreamed

of striking it rich in the gold fields of Colorado. He became disillusioned on his way there after continually meeting with empty-handed miners on their way back East, and switched tactics, purchasing Rock Creek Station in 1859.

Rock Creek was one of the most difficult crossings on the Oregon-California Trail, requiring travelers to

undergo the arduous process of hoisting their wagons up and down its steep, rocky banks. Seizing an opportunity for business, McCanles built a bridge and charged travelers a toll of 10 to 50 cents to cross, depending on their ability to pay and the size of the load.

McCanles also divided the property into east and west ranches, continuing to use the West Ranch as an emigrant



PHOTO BY RENAE BLUM

Prior to shooting the photo re-creation, Mobley cleans the glass plate the image will be exposed onto, standing next to his darkbox.

stop, and improving the East Ranch by building a cabin and a well. In 1860, he leased the East Ranch to the Russell, Majors and Waddell Company, founders of the Pony Express, who established Rock Creek Station as the second Pony Express relay station in Nebraska. The company purchased the East Ranch from McCanles in 1861, but soon fell behind in payments as the Pony Express slid into financial failure.

Things came to a head on July 12, 1861. McCanles – accompanied by his 12-year-old son, Monroe – approached the East Ranch cabin to speak with station keeper Horace Wellman, intending to demand full payment or repossession of the property. No one can say for certain what happened next, but the likely events have been reconstructed based on an account written by Monroe 54 years later.

The affair was brief and vicious. Wellman refused to come to the door,

and McCanles threatened to come in and drag him out. He was then shot – unarmed – by a young ranch hand named James Butler Hickok.

Hearing the shot, McCanles' cousin James Woods and friend James Gordon ran from the barn to help, only to be wounded by Hickok's pistol. Wellman emerged from the cabin with a grub hoe and clubbed Woods to death. He took a swing at Monroe, who fled and successfully escaped. Gordon wasn't so lucky – he was shot to death by stock tender J.W. "Doc" Brink. In a 30-minute trial, the men pled self-defense and were acquitted. Because of his age, Monroe was not allowed to testify.

The incident launched Hickok into dime store novel fame and helped earn him the nickname "Wild Bill" Hickok. (According to *Harper's Magazine*, Hickok fought off the fearsome "McCanles gang" single-handedly,

despite being gravely wounded.) Wild Bill went on to create a legendary career as a gunfighter, soldier, spy and wagon master. He died at age 39, shot in the back of the head while playing poker in a saloon in Deadwood, South Dakota. His hand of cards – said to be two pairs of aces and eights – is known

as "the dead man's hand."

Over time, the westward flow of travelers shifted elsewhere, and the arrival of the railroad and telegraph put traffic on the Oregon-California Trail at a standstill. Rock Creek Station fell into disrepair, and the buildings vanished. The land was used for

farming, though landowners took care not to disturb the wagon wheel ruts, which are still visible today.

In 1980, the Nebraska State Historical Society began researching the grounds to help the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission reconstruct the buildings. High-tech instruments

were used to analyze the structures' foundations, but little else was as precious to their work as a rare 1860 daguerreotype discovered at the California State Library in Sacramento – the only known photo of Rock Creek Station during its operation.

It provides a clear picture of the



PHOTO BY CODY MOBLEY

The re-created photograph of Rock Creek Station, by Cody Mobley, shot in August 2016.

East Ranch at its peak: the cabin where McCanles would be murdered, the barn and bunkhouse, and the toll bridge cabin on the right. The West Ranch sits in the distance, surrounded by the Oregon-California Trail path. Nearly-indiscernible figures dot the scene: three people gathered by the bunkhouse, a man sitting on the stoop of the toll bridge cabin, the stagecoach driver, and the mysterious figure, believed to be McCanles, in the foreground. Little did they know that their likenesses – and the buildings surrounding them – would be pored over more than a century later by researchers, history buffs, living history interpreters and a modern-day wet plate photographer from Texas.

“We wanted to give the park a tangible artifact,” said Mitch Critel, explaining why he and his friends wanted to re-create the historic 1860 Rock Creek Station photograph. “The original belongs to someone else. The thinking was that the park could use it for publicity or whatever else they might need it for.”

Critel is part of a band of volunteers who regularly put on living history

events at Rock Creek Station State Historical Park. The photo re-creation took place during a living history event that required a year and a half to plan, and involved living historians from around the country who drove in to help out. One of them was Critel’s old friend, 33-year-old Cody Mobley.

“I knew Cody was really getting into the experimentation of wet plate photography,” Critel said. “Since I was able to talk him into making the long haul up here, I knew we could give it a shot.”

Wet plate photography is one of the earliest forms of photography and was the dominant process used from the 1850s to the 1880s. It is called “wet plate” because the image is exposed onto a plate of glass that has been submerged in a bath of silver nitrate, and the picture must be developed before the solution dries. From start to finish, the entire process typically takes Mobley less than seven minutes.

Mobley has shot historic photo re-creations before; it’s not uncommon for wet plate photographers. But Rock Creek Station holds a special allure as a subject. It has almost no modern intrusions and provides a photographer

with an entire scene of historically accurate buildings to play with.

Because of the type of photograph they were shooting, both Mobley and his 1860s photographer counterpart had to be especially sensitive to the conditions and weather around them.

“Any dust that’s blowing can affect the plate, any moisture in the air, even a cloud rolling in,” Mobley said. “There are so many variants that go on while you’re shooting, so you have to adjust on your feet; that’s the art of it.”

Because of this, wet plate photography is one of the hardest forms of photography to master. It took Mobley a month or two to feel confident with the wet plate process, and he remembers his elation when he made his first successful image.

The original Rock Creek photograph is a daguerreotype, the form of photography directly preceding wet plate. Mobley thinks that the photographer used the daguerreotype process because it was going out of style and, thus, was cheaper. (Mobley uses wet plate himself, rather than the daguerreotype process, because today, it’s less expensive, easier, and more historically accurate for the



PHOTO BY CODY MOBLEY

While at Rock Creek Station, Mobley shot a pastoral scene of haymakers cutting grass on the East Ranch.

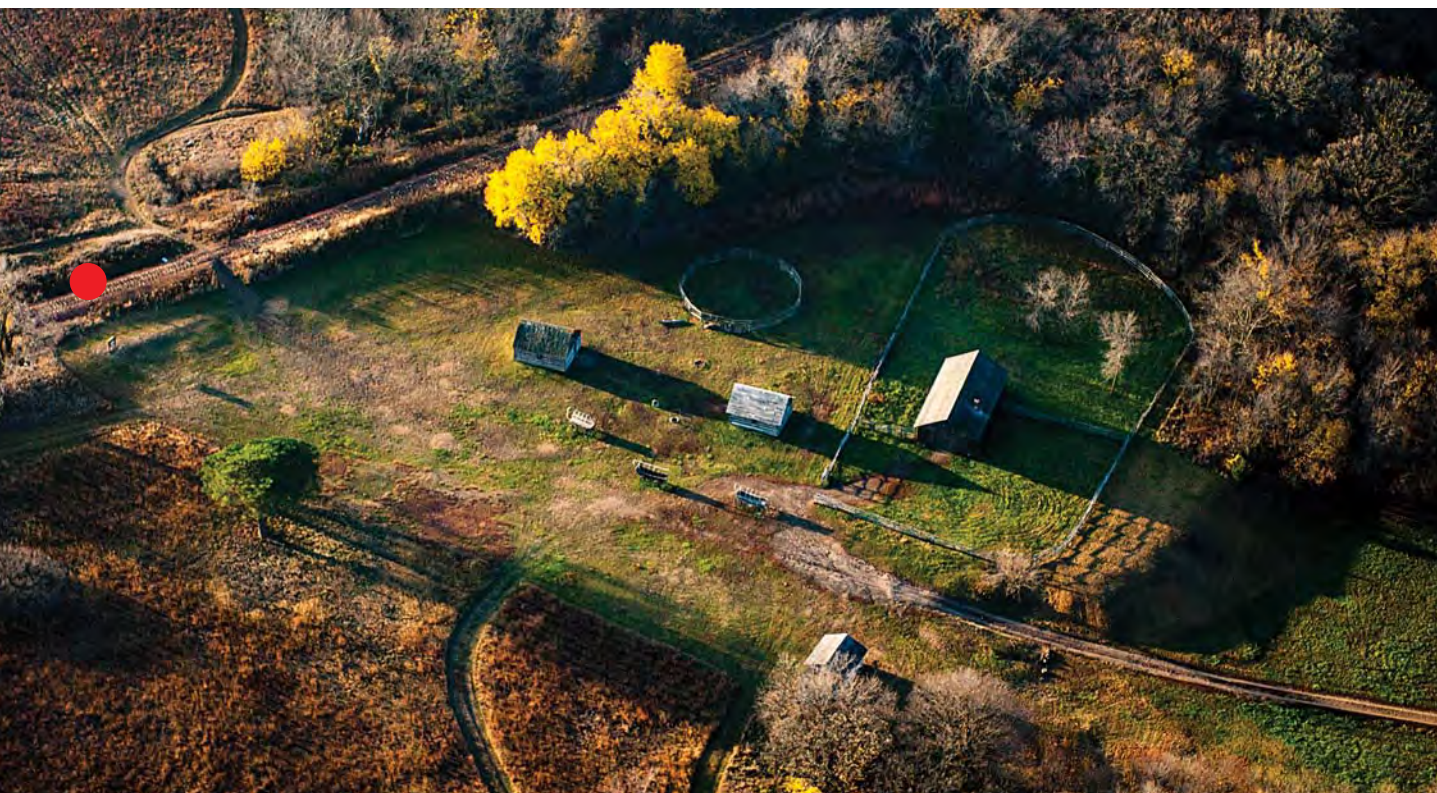


PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER

The East Ranch buildings pictured are the cabin where McCanles was murdered, left, the bunkhouse, the Pony Express barn, and the toll bridge cabin across from it. Mobley and the original photographer stood approximately where the red dot is.

historic site that he manages.) He speculates that the photographer shot pictures professionally, as an itinerant photographer traveling the Oregon-California Trail in a photographic van. “Like a gypsy van, a travelling dark room,” Mobley said. Did the photographer ever stop his journeys to go home?

“Usually they’re itinerants because they really didn’t have anything back East to live for. They didn’t have a home there,” he said.

Itinerant photographers advertised their services via letter or by the lettering on the side of their vans as they traveled. They’d stay at a particular site, shooting whatever paid until business dried up. The profession was open to anyone, male or female, young or old, who had the money to buy chemicals and equipment.

Mobley began shooting wet plate

photographs to document programs at the historic site that he manages, Fort McKavett. Lately, wet plate has become a side business for him as well as a service he volunteers to other historic sites. The Rock Creek Station shoot was his first time traveling out of state to shoot wet plate. He has also begun holding workshops for others interested in learning the process.

He was happy to help Critel and his other friends at Rock Creek Station re-create the photo.

“If they hold more events, I’ll definitely come back and support it,” he said. ■

To see more of Cody Mobley’s work, visit facebook.com/rubyambrotypes. To read more about Rock Creek Station State Historical Park and plan a visit, go to OutdoorNebraska.org/rockcreekstation.



Located approximately 6 miles east of Fairbury in Jefferson County, Rock Creek Station State Historical Park encompasses 350 acres of prairie hilltops, timber-studded creek bottoms and rugged ravines. Deep ruts carved by travelers on the Oregon-California Trail are still visible near the visitors center.

Besides its draw as a historical site, the park offers a generous picnicking area, six miles of trails for hiking, biking and horseback riding, and a modern campground on the adjacent Rock Creek Station State Recreation Area. For more information, contact the park at 402-729-5777. Rock Creek Station SHP is located at 57426 710th Rd. in Fairbury.

Blowouts

A Unique Feature of the Sandhills

Story and photos by Chris Helzer

Blowouts have a bad reputation. In sports, a blowout is humiliating for the losing team and sometimes even a little boring for the winners. A tire blowout can ruin your whole day and potentially lead to a serious accident. In the Nebraska Sandhills, a “blowout” is a site where scouring winds have created bare ground and actively move sand. Most Sandhills ranchers look at blowouts the same way most farmers look at weedy fields – as indicators of poor management.

Despite their low standing among ranchers, however, Sandhills blowouts provide important habitat for many plant and animal species. If you were to walk up to a Sandhills blowout in the middle of a summer day, your first impression might be that it is devoid of life. A closer look, though, reveals a much different story.

The margins of the blowout are a battleground where feisty plant species are constantly straining for a foothold in shifting sands. Predatory insects roam the open sandy terrain, hunting down small flies and other invertebrates, while well-camouflaged grasshoppers feed on the sparse vegetation, and tiny holes in the sand indicate the nests of sand wasps and other little burrowing creatures. Tracks of lizards, toads, beetles, grouse, and both large and small mammals are also scattered across blowouts, providing evidence of a much more active animal community than might be evident at first glance.

Right: A prairie lizard hunts in the open sand of a Sandhills blowout.

Opposite: Tracks are seen outside the entrance of a kangaroo rat burrow, the most abundant mammal found in blowouts.

Top: A large and very active blowout is seen at The Nature Conservancy's Niobrara Valley Preserve in Brown County.





During the last couple of years, I've been trying to learn as much as I can about blowouts. I've always been drawn to blowouts as a photographer because they are great places to find tracks and other interesting patterns in the sand, and because insects, lizards and toads can't hide behind vegetation when I'm trying to photograph them. More recently, however, I've begun realizing how little is actually known about the ecology of blowouts.

We know quite a bit about how blowouts form, and botanists have documented the plant species that most often grow in blowouts. Surprisingly, though, there is very little known about the communities of animals using blowouts as habitat. Because of that, I've been paying attention to plants, but trying even harder to document the insects, lizards, toads and other creatures I find in blowouts, hoping to better understand the value of these areas of open sand that annoy ranchers but seem to attract many Sandhills animals.



Active blowouts are largely unvegetated, of course, but plants are constantly working to change that. The biggest challenge to plants growing in and around blowouts is to somehow anchor themselves in open, moving sand. Most of the grasses and wildflowers in blowouts are using an extensive web of rhizomes (underground stems) to hold them in place. What appears, at



first, to be a colony of independent plants is often one large plant with many shoots emerging from a vast and interconnected network of underground rhizomes.

Strongly rhizomatous grasses such as blowout grass and prairie sandreed are commonly found near the actively eroding edges of blowouts where few other plants can survive. Lemon scurfpea and blowout penstemon are examples of wildflowers with similar strategies. Other plant species often seen in and around blowouts include sand lovegrass, plains muhly, winged dock and painted milkvetch.

All of these plants can help stabilize shifting sands enough that other species can begin to fill in around them, beginning a process of revegetation. Ironically, revegetation brings more competitive plants that usually end up eliminating the early colonizers that made it all possible.

Blowout grass (opposite, top) is one of the first colonizers of many blowouts, and, along with painted milkvetch (opposite, bottom) and the endangered blowout penstemon (left), helps to stabilize blowing sands enough to allow other plants to become established. As those plants gain a foothold, blowouts like the one pictured below can slowly become revegetated.



Sparse vegetation in blowouts may mean a scarcity of food for cattle and other large herbivores, but it creates fantastic habitat for many other animals. Blowouts often draw animals to their warm sun-heated sands on cool days, and many birds and mammals use blowouts as a place for dust baths to clean themselves and manage parasite loads.

Burrowing animals, ranging in size from kangaroo rats to tiny sand wasps, tunnel into blowouts to create nesting and food storage dens. Maintaining a burrow in an environment defined by blowing sand must be quite a task. I've watched sand wasps clean out the opening of their tunnel, only to have it almost immediately closed up again by blowing sand.



Above, Left to Right: Punctured tiger beetle (*Cicindela punctulata*), big sand tiger beetle (*C. formosa*), and festive tiger beetle (*C. scutellaris*).
Below: A robber fly has just caught a sandy tiger beetle (*C. limbata*).



Large numbers of insects can be found roaming the open sand, including grasshoppers, beetles and large numbers of flies and other tiny winged creatures. The abundance of potential prey draws predators like toads and lizards, along with many species of tiger beetles and other predatory insects such as wasps and robber flies. Because there is little cover to hide behind, many of these predators sit still for long periods of time and then use quick bursts of speed to catch prey that stray too close.

As I was photographing a tiger beetle last summer, I crept too close and the wary beetle opened its wings and took off. In an instant, a large robber fly exploded from the ground nearby and nabbed the beetle right out of the air. The two fell to the ground together where the fly quickly killed and ate the beetle. In open ground, bursts of speed help catch prey, but they also make you visible to other predators.

Blowout Formation

Sandhills blowouts are usually found on upper slopes of steep dunes where strong northwest winds can pick up and move exposed grains of sand, especially during the winter and early spring. Most commonly, blowouts originate in places where repeated heavy grazing or vehicle travel has weakened or removed vegetation, leaving sand unanchored and unbuffered against wind erosion. Once a blowout gets started, actively blowing sand across the surface of the ground can make it difficult for plants to establish there, helping to perpetuate the blowout's existence.

Most ranchers try to prevent the formation of blowouts by using conservative stocking rates and strategic grazing rotations. Many also are careful about where they drive vehicles to avoid triggering blowouts along well-used paths on steep slopes. Once blowouts form, ranchers use various techniques to try to get them to heal up again. Excluding livestock with temporary fences can help, and sometimes hay or even old tires are spread on the ground in an attempt to cover bare sand and slow erosion. ■

We still have a lot to learn about the plants and animals inhabiting blowouts, but I think it's clear that blowouts can be awfully difficult places to live. The lack of vegetation means there is no place to hide from the hot sun and predators, and the sand is constantly shifting beneath your feet (or roots). Burrowing beneath the sand seems like a good idea, but even then the sand just blows your tunnel shut.

Sandhills ranchers are unlikely to change their unfavorable attitudes toward blowouts, and I get that. However, blowouts are a natural and integral part of the Sandhills, and even the most careful grazing management won't completely eliminate them. As long as there are choppy hills and strong winds there will be blowouts. While that might be an unsettling reality for ranchers, it helps ensure the survival of many other members of the Sandhills community. Those other citizens might not pay taxes but they certainly work for their living. ■



Above: A beetle makes its way across a broad expanse of bare sand.

Below: A sand wasp cleans out the entrance of its burrow as wind gusts blow sand right back in.



Above: A grasshopper shows off its extraordinary camouflage as it sits in a blowout.

Below: Woodhouse's toads are commonly seen in and around blowouts.



Northern Prairies Land Trust

a partner in landscape conservation

By Gerry Steinauer, Botanist

From the looks of it, this would be a tough prescribed fire.

Highly flammable cedars grew thick among the dry prairie grass and the pasture's rough topography could send the March winds swirling, throwing embers from burning cedars in all directions. If these smoldering brands landed in the adjacent pastures and started spot fires, the flames could race across the hills to the next county road, burning the neighbors' forage

and fence posts.

Despite the challenges, the pasture's tenant, rancher Jon Immink, had minimized his worries. He had gathered a fleet of battered, old pickups and rangers equipped with pumper units, and his burn crew – consisting of his son, Jacob, neighbors and three Northern Prairies Land Trust (NPLT) biologists – was experienced. The latter assist with dozens of prescribed burns each year, and their



A red-cedar-filled draw erupts into flame during a prescribed burn on Immink Ranch in the Sandstone Prairies Biologically Unique Landscape.



PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER

Rolling hills cloaked with tallgrass prairie and draws lined with bur oaks survive in the Sandstone Prairies Biologically Unique Landscape of Jefferson and Thayer counties.

know-how would prove handy during tense moments of the fire.

The Immink burn was just one of hundreds of conservation projects that NPLT has helped implement in eastern Nebraska prairies and oak woodlands over the past 15 years. Working in partnership with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission and other conservation groups, their results are exceptional.

The Partnership

The Northern Prairies Land Trust was formed in 1999 in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, by a group of conservation-minded lawyers. Initially they did typical land trust work in Nebraska and South Dakota: helping landowners protect prairies, streams

or other natural features by placing voluntary conservation easements on properties. In 2005, however, their role in Nebraska expanded.

That year, conservation groups finalized the Nebraska Natural Legacy Project, a detailed plan to preserve Nebraska's biodiversity in 40 Biologically Unique Landscapes (BULs) scattered throughout the state. BULs are areas with high concentrations of remnant native prairies, woodlands or wetlands and therefore offer the best opportunity to conserve our native flora and fauna.

With a plan in place on paper, the Commission now needed biologists to make it a reality on the landscape. This is where NPLT came to play a key role in the success of the Legacy Project. "As a state agency, we have limits

on the number of employees we can hire," said Alicia Hardin, Commission wildlife division administrator.

"Northern Prairies, however, was able to hire staff and put them in our offices and we worked as a team. We are so privileged to have them in Nebraska."

Stationed in Beatrice, Jarren Kuipers was the first NPLT employee in Nebraska. He worked primarily in the Sandstone Prairies and Southeast Prairies BULs which have expansive tracts of remnant tallgrass prairie. These prairies were spared from conversion to cropland because their sandstone- and glacial till-derived soils were often too shallow or rocky for plowing.

In 2006, Kuipers was joined by Kent Pfeiffer. The pair had a knack for writing Nebraska Environmental Trust



Northern Prairies Land Trust biologists implement conservation primarily in the above mapped Biologically Unique Landscapes: 1) Middle Niobrara, 2) Keya Paha, 3) Verdigris-Bazile, 4) Ponca Bluffs, 5) Indian Cave Bluffs, 6) Rulo Bluffs, 7) Southeast Prairies and 8) Sandstone Prairies.



PHOTO BY GERRY STEINHAUER

Biologists Kelly Corman (left, NPLT), Cassidy Wessel (NGPC), Jen Corman (then Nebraska Forest Service, currently NPLT) and Josh Kounovsky (NGPC) plan an oak woodland project on the Niobrara River bluffs in Brown County.

grants and procuring project funds from other conservation partners, such as the US Fish and Wildlife Service.

To date, NPLT has completed nearly 330 projects which have enhanced roughly 70,000 acres of prairie and oak woods in the Sandstone Prairies and Southeast Prairies landscapes. By providing cost-share to landowners, they remove invasive red-cedars and brush, implement prescribed fire and planned grazing, and reseed cropland to grassland. These projects benefit biodiversity and simultaneously improve pasture quality and the ranchers' bottom line.

Though Kuipers has since left for other professional endeavors, six other NPLT staff have joined Pfeiffer in Nebraska. Five are biologists implementing similar conservation projects in the Indian Cave Bluffs, Keya Paha, Middle Niobrara, Ponca Bluffs, Rulo Bluffs and Verdigris-Bazile BULs.

Jamie Bachmann is an education specialist housed in the Commission's Norfolk office. Her mission is to spread NPLT's conservation message in the classroom and other settings. A popular event started by Kuipers, and now organized by Pfeiffer, is the

annual Tallgrass Prairie Seminar held at Southeast Community College in Beatrice. The seminar consistently attracts about 100 landowners and conservationists who have the opportunity to learn about prairie, woodland and wetland management practices and how they can be applied to improve the health of the land they own or manage.

Managing Oak Woodlands in State Parks

For a millennia in spring and fall, Native Americans set fire to eastern Nebraska's oak woodlands with the intent of maintaining open groves for hunting and food gathering. With tree densities limited, plentiful sunlight reached the woodland floor stimulating wildflowers, fruit-bearing shrubs and the saplings of the sun-loving oaks. Euroamerican settlement brought the suppression of wildfires, and the woods are now thick with brush and shade-tolerant trees, such as elms and hackberries. Under the dense shade, the seedlings of bur, black and other oaks

now wither for want of sun, and as the mighty, old oaks die, there are few young trees to replace them. Southern flying squirrels, timber rattlesnakes and other wildlife dependent on open oak woods are in severe decline.

Located on the rugged Missouri River bluffs, Indian Cave and Ponca state parks are home to some of the largest and best remaining oak woodlands in eastern Nebraska. Extensive woodlands also occur on private lands bordering the parks. Unfortunately, bustling day-to-day activities in the two parks limit the staffs' time to manage the more than 3,000 acres of woods found there.

Fortunately, in 2011, NPLT came to the Commission's aid when they hired the first of three woodland managers for the Indian Cave Bluffs, Ponca Bluffs and Rulo Bluffs BULs. On hot and humid summer days, Krista Lang and Chance Brueggemann are often deep in the mosquito-infested woods at Indian Cave State Park pulling flowering plants of the invasive garlic mustard or are herbicide-spraying the noxious sericea lespedeza on ridgetop prairies.

In fall, they prepare fire breaks and conduct prescribed burns. On cold winter days, James Baker can be found



PHOTO BY GERRY STEINHAUER

Butterfly milkweed is one of many wildflowers that have responded well to tree thinning and prescribed fire in oak woodlands at Indian Cave State Park.

cutting cedars from the oak woods at Ponca State Park. Diverse funding sources allow the three to also help manage oak woods and prairies on private lands and Commission Wildlife Management Areas (WMA). Baker, for example, controls unwanted brush at Wiseman and Basswood WMAs which overlook the Missouri River in northern Nebraska while Lang and Brueggemann

help private landowners burn oak woods in southeastern Nebraska.

The trio's impact at Ponca and Indian Cave is visibly evident. Tree densities are lower, the woods are more open, and ridgetop prairies are expanding. At Indian Cave, wildflowers not seen in years, such as bastard toadflax, pale gentian and butterfly milkweed are again providing summer color. Perhaps

most exciting, with ample sun-light, the young oaks now have a chance of reaching adulthood.

Private Lands Conservation

Because Nebraska's rural landscape is 97 percent privately owned, the



PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER

Piles of cut red-cedars dot a prairie in the Sandstone Prairies. NPLT provides cost-share to landowners to cut cedars if they agree to conduct follow up prescribed burns to prevent re-invasion.

involvement of farmers and ranchers is critical if we are to conserve our biodiversity. “Private land conservation is all about developing relationships with landowners and gaining their trust,” said Pfeiffer. He explained that many problems in native habitats result from inadequate management and can be alleviated. Cedar invasion in prairie is the classic example. “Pastures are often managed in ways that promote invasion by cedars and other trees. My job is to show landowners approaches to management that sustain prairies, not brush.”

Pfeiffer also stressed the importance of conserving native landscapes, explaining that many wildlife species require large blocks of un-fragmented habitat. A viable population of prairie chickens, the quintessential tallgrass prairie bird, for example, requires thousands of acres of open, treeless grassland with a variety of grass densities for wintering, booming, nesting and brood rearing. “An 80-acre prairie surrounded by cropland will not support prairie chickens,” said Pfeiffer.

Native plants and insects also fare better in large landscapes. In small, isolated prairies, for example, species are often extirpated by herbicide or pesticide spraying, overgrazing or

other events and there is little chance of recolonization without other prairies nearby. In native landscapes species can move about, repopulating lost habitats. “Prairies and woodlands need to be managed at the scale required by species,” added Pfeiffer.

By working in our remaining native landscapes, conservationists also get more bang for their limited conservation bucks. For instance, if nesting cover for prairie chickens is lacking in a landscape, a single grazing management project, which includes resting pastures allowing for denser grass growth for nesting, could enhance chicken populations for miles around. Conservation projects in landscapes also tend to build on themselves.

“When you help a rancher with cedar cutting or prescribed burning in their pasture, the word spreads pretty fast and soon you are working with the neighbor, and then the people a few miles up the road,” said Pfeiffer.

Ranchers Jon and Jacob Immink have worked closely with NPLT in the Sandstone Prairies for many years. “We have been ranching in these Jefferson County hills for 30 years and were probably some of the first people Jarren Kuipers worked with,” said Jon Immink. The Imminks have

completed over a dozen cedar and brush management and prescribed burn projects through NPLT on the nearly 4,500 acres of pasture they own or lease.

“We started by cutting cedars off the uplands,” said Immink. “Then we looked at our draws and creek bottoms. This was the best ground on the place, but they were filthy with brush and trees and worthless for grazing.” Cost-share funds provided by NPLT helped the Imminks with the projects on their own lands, and they were essential on the pastures they lease from elderly owners who lack the financial resources to control woody plants.

The Imminks have also become

staunch believers in using prescribed fire to enhance pastures, and they promote the practice to other area ranchers. Though their initial burns were small, spring fires, they and their neighbors will now jointly burn over a thousand acres of pasture. Pfeiffer, Lang and Brueggemann often help with the more complicated burns.

Recently, Pfeiffer convinced the Imminks to try winter burning. “Winter burns are really great for killing cedars. Their foliage is so dry that they succumb easily to the heat and flames,” said Jon Immink. “The winter fires also creep through the low ground killing brush. Later in spring, the grass in the bottoms is too green to burn. Our

burned pastures always have the best summer grass and the cows love them.”

Cattle are not the only animals responding well to the Imminks’ prairie management. “Our cedar cutting and fire has done great things for wildlife. We now see large flocks of prairie chickens, and quail are everywhere in our pastures,” said Immink. “The chickens boom in spring on one of our hilltop prairies so we graze the area short each year so the birds will return.”

Over the years, Jon Immink and Pfeiffer have spent hours together driving pastures discussing prairie wildlife and management. Their time together has forged a mutual trust

which was evident during critical moments of Immink’s prescribed fire when he relied on Pfeiffer’s experience and advice. The fire training of other NPLT staff also proved valuable. When large cedars in a draw erupted into flames and drifting embers started spot fires in an adjacent pasture, Brueggemann had anticipated the threat and was waiting to douse them with water.

At the day’s end, the burn safely done, the 130-acre pasture was littered with scorched cedars, and relaxing among friends, Jon Immink’s face held a wide smile. Another successful Northern Prairies Land Trust project was complete. ■



PHOTO BY GERRY STEINHAUER

NPLT’s Chance Brueggemann gazes upon the smoldering aftermath of the prescribed burn on the Immink pasture. The early March fire resulted in the nearly complete kill of all red-cedars less than 10 feet tall.

O Tannenbaum! O Tannenbaum!

Even the despised red-cedar has a place in nature.

By Roger Welsch

When I bought this sandpile on the north bank of the Middle Loup River 40 years ago, there was every chance that one good windstorm would blow the whole thing – sand, cactus and all – into South Dakota. Of course, genius that I am, I bought the place under three feet of snow, and the reality that I was in fact now the owner of Nebraska's Sahara only slowly came to light as spring came on. Almost in panic, I went to various conservation organizations and begged for help, which they most generously gave. We soon had the ground planted to a rich variety of native grasses, plants, bushes and trees, and almost a mile of thick treed windbreaks surrounded the most fragile of the ground.

There was conversation in town because for all the activity and noise I made about planting tens of thousands of trees on these 50 acres; for many years, there wasn't much to see since what few saplings survived took years to rise above the faster growing grasses, chokecherries, plums, lead plant and honeysuckle.

And now that we are surrounded by a dense wall of soaring ash, long-needle pines and junipers, comes the inevitable disappointment of the hopeful conservationist: the elm are all gone, the ash are threatened, and the pine are dying all around us. But the tree known here as red-cedar (*Juniperus virginiana*)? Why, they're doing fine!

Except everyone is cutting them down, gouging them out, piling them up and burning them. All at once, these trees I worked so hard to plant and water have become pariahs, as hated as musk thistles. I point out that these now-despised evergreens are the source of gin and fine martinis – if you don't believe me, taste one of those little blue-green berries! But that good news will certainly fall on a deaf ear for Nebraskans, whose tastes tend toward light beer, blended whiskies, and blue-green drinks that wear umbrellas.

My fondness for these prickly arboreals stems from another feature of the tree that might convince some of you who are so intent on cleansing the Plains of one of my favorites. Let me tell you a story: A friend and I were once floating the Platte between Grand Island and Central City, one of my favorite stretches of water in Nebraska. The river was high and the days were gorgeous. We feasted on wild asparagus and gigantic morel mushrooms we plucked from the bank as we drifted by, only rarely dipping an oar in the quiet water.

Then Nebraska did what Nebraska does for such idylls: the sky went suddenly dark, there were growls and grumbles, and the rain began to fall in torrents. We had no time to set a tent, so we tied up the boat and dived onto one of the thousands of small islands that pass for "river" along that stretch. We were lucky. Right at our mooring was a gigantic red-cedar – a real giant. And I suspect there are many of these venerable old-timers on the Platte islands where they have escaped fire and woodcutters for generations, perhaps even more than a century. Its overhanging lower branches covered a circle maybe 30 feet across in which nothing else was growing and the duff under it was soft as a pillow.

We hunkered down against the huge trunk and broke out some sandwiches while the storm raged around us. I told my buddy we were safe because both homesteaders and Indians, such as the Omahas and Pawnees, believed cedars were good protection against lightning. That's why we can often spot old homesteads where all the buildings are gone but two big cedar trees still frame where the front door of the long-gone house opened. Whatever the folklore, one thing was clear about this enormous tree that was sheltering us: The wide, sloping, dense branches and needles formed an almost impenetrable shelter. To our amazement while the rain poured outside our cedar "tent," we remained

dry and out of the wind in its cover. The shelter was in fact so comfortable and the experience so remarkable, we called the day good and spent the night sleeping right there, in a dry and pleasant shelter provided by Mother Nature.

And that's why I have a fondness for cedars to this very day. Occasionally when Nebraska cuts loose, as it did just last week, with raging winds and pounding hail, peeling the paint off our house and breaking windows, I wonder about our neighbors – the crow family of which I am so fond; a pair of kestrels rescued, nursed to health by Raptor Recovery and released to freedom a couple weeks ago; the resident mourning doves; turkeys; deer; coyotes; the red fox behind Linda's studio; the great horned owl we watched taking a pounding from my crows a few days ago. How do they fare in these storms when even we, in a strong, firm house, wonder about our safety?

Then we remember: They probably saw it coming long before we did and made ready; they've been through this before and know quite well where to go and what to do; and perhaps most important of all, they have thousands of big, old cedars to hide in and under. My guess and my comfort is that they are doing just fine. And sure enough, the next morning when the sun is out, the winds calm down, and the hail melts away, there they all are, no worse for the wear, and as far as we can see, going on about their business as if they hadn't even noticed yesterday's fury. Like my boating partner and me, they, too, sought shelter under one of our big old cedar trees, now despised by so many. ■

Roger Welsch is an author, humorist and folklorist. He has written for NEBRASKAland Magazine since 1977.



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The “What I Continue to Use” Product Review

These items have stood the test of time.

By Jeff Kurrus

Through the years I have found it is increasingly difficult to endorse new outdoor products from companies unless I have spent considerably more time vetting them than normally allowed. A company will showcase a new item, but then want nearly immediate results on whether or not that item warranted a review.

I have since ceased replying in short order to these companies. I want to give readers something that stands the test of time. With that in mind, the following list of items are products that have become part of my day-to-day life, those objects that not only looked good out of the box, but have proven to be essential to my outdoor pursuits. ■

This winter, I repeatedly used a Colorado-manufactured camouflage Fishmask to keep my face and neck warm during ice-fishing season, then used that same product to cover my face from an approaching tom during spring turkey season. Featuring bandanas, single and double-layered tubes and balaclavas in a variety of color patterns, these moisture-wicking products from Fishmask have become part of my everyday outdoor supplies year-round. Fishmasks.com.



Billed as the world’s toughest coffeemaker, the COFFEEBOXX works with all K-Cup®-compatible pods. With a 2.5 liter removable water tank, what I like most about this coffeemaker is its separate hot-water line, which can provide hot water for a variety of purposes in less than 40 seconds. It’s a must-have for the deer camp cabin. Oxx.com.

I have filled up an entire **NEBRASKAland Recycled Journal Book** and recently purchased another. With 100 sheets of lined pages and measuring 5.62 by 7 inches, it’s my go-to “I have to write this down” journal when afield or sitting at the house.



Despite having car, wall, and even solar-powered cell phone chargers, I still make sure my myCharge isn’t far away. With adaptors for both Droid and Apple products, this charger goes with me on trips to the park with my kids or trips to the fishing boat with friends and family. It’s small, light-weight, and can fit in my pocket. myCharge.com.



Our Family Species Contest

The term “On the Fly” has taken on even greater meaning in my home.

By Jeff Kurrus

While this might sound self-serving, nothing influences my outdoor decisions more than the work of my colleagues at *NEBRASKAland Magazine*. The first time I read Jenny Nguyen’s “Sleeping Outside” article in this month’s issue, I immediately began preparing my first family tent camping expedition of the year.

Last year, I had a similar response following Nguyen’s “Species Contest at Gavins” article in our June issue, which featured a group of friends who participated in an annual contest each year at Gavins Point Dam that focused on how many different species of fish they could catch.

My dad and I then took this idea in a slightly different direction. We started our own species contest, but ours focused on fish that we had caught on the fly.

Very quickly we picked up the same species – largemouth bass, bluegill, black and white crappie, and rainbow trout – and had to show proof through a photograph if we happened to be fishing apart. But then it became interesting.

Dad caught a grass carp and a channel catfish, both major hurdles during the summer fishing season to land with a fly rod. In turn, a trip to the Pine Ridge offered me a brown trout, and a summer excursion to Battle Lake, Minnesota,

saw me catch a smallmouth bass.

Then came the day that the longnose gar was feeding at the surface. I worked this fish for nearly 30 minutes trying to get him to hit, finally talking the fish into striking a red popping bug. I couldn’t have been more thrilled to catch a fish that I had rarely, if ever, thought about before.

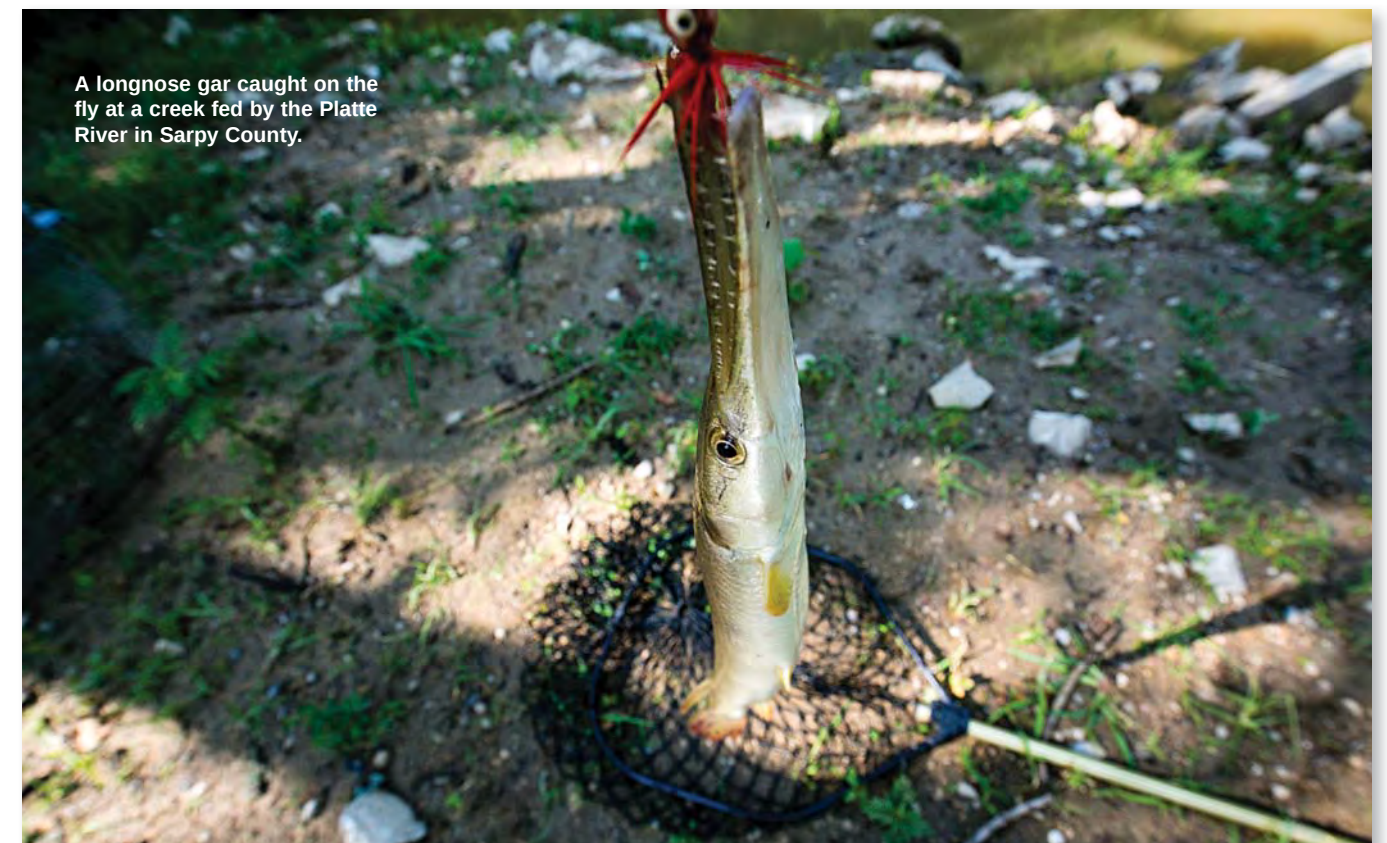
While I ended up losing the first annual family fishing contest 11 to 9, it forced my dad and me to start learning about the various fish species that Nebraska has to offer outside of what we’ve been catching on the fly for years – largemouth bass and bluegill.

Even a small fish became a huge accomplishment, as seen when I increased my lead early this spring with my first ever brook trout – an eight-inch beauty.

But dad quickly countered that with the season’s first channel catfish, with ideas for where he can catch a redear sunfish and bullhead. I have my work cut out for me, even though I’ve now hired a team of fisheries biologists to help me counter dad’s old-school trickery.

I hope it’s enough. If not, I definitely know a creek that will give me a chance to catch a longnose gar, if I can just talk him into hitting again this year. ■

A longnose gar caught on the fly at a creek fed by the Platte River in Sarpy County.



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Fishing in the Southwest

A summer profile of six reservoirs in this Nebraska region.

By Julie Geiser

Southwestern Nebraska offers six large reservoirs where the camping is modern or primitive, the activities are endless and the fishing is unique.

Medicine Creek or Harry Strunk Reservoir State Recreation Area has been great for fishing as water levels are at 100 percent. The reservoir has three public boat ramp areas and many bays to catch pan-size to trophy catfish of any species. Blue catfish were stocked in 2015 and are growing. Medicine Creek is known for its naturally reproducing channel catfish along with stocked walleye and wipers. Four public cabins are available for rent at Medicine Creek along with ample camping and amenities.

Red Willow is back after the water levels were drawn down in 2009 to allow for dam repairs, which were completed in late 2013. Water levels are at 44 percent and still increasing. Wipers, white crappie, walleye, northern pike, white bass, channel catfish and largemouth bass survived the drawdown and additional fish were stocked in 2015 – good survival, productivity and growth is expected. A public fishing pier and two boat ramp areas are available.



Camping is available at two campgrounds offering 35- and 50-amp hookups for modern camping. Tent camping areas are also available.

Fishing at **Enders Reservoir** will be comparable to years since 2014, when water levels were dropped as part of the Republican River Compact. Water levels are at 20 percent and will likely fall throughout the summer as water is sent to Kansas. The lake is stocked with walleye, white bass and channel catfish at rates that reflect the current water levels. There is one primitive, gravel launching area at No Name Bay. Four-wheel drive vehicles are recommended. Larger boats will struggle to launch from this area. Enders has upgraded modern camping with several amenities.

Rock Creek SRA is a hidden treasure of the southwest. Tiger, brown and rainbow trout grown at the adjacent Rock Creek State Fish Hatchery are stocked at the lake and provide anglers an excellent opportunity to catch multiple trout species year-round. Largemouth bass grow big in the backwaters of Rock Creek, and the lake was stocked with rock bass and channel catfish in 2016.

Primitive camping areas are tucked away at this area, but there is plenty of space and beautiful sceneries at Rock Creek.

Swanson Reservoir has been stocked with blue catfish, some of which are reaching the 28-inch mark, making for excellent trophy fishing. Walleye, wipers, white bass and channel catfish are also at Swanson. There are two boat ramps available and the water levels are at 57 percent.

Swanson has several primitive camping locations along its many boundaries and off trails three, four and seven. Two modern campgrounds have electric hookups and amenities.

Harlan County Reservoir has three fish species that drive the system: walleye, white bass and channel catfish. Walleye are stocked annually as fry. Channel catfish have

been stocked at Harlan Reservoir to boost populations as needed.

When water levels are high, the crappie, northern pike and largemouth bass fishing peaks as these shoreline species are dependent on higher water levels and shoreline habitat for reproduction and survival. Largemouth and pike are stocked when water levels are high to boost their population. Water levels are at 72 percent and will continue to rise.

Camping at Harlan County Reservoir is managed by the Corps of Engineers. There are several modern camping areas and places around the perimeter of the reservoir to camp. A Nebraska Park Entry Permit is not required to camp at Harlan but camping fees are enforced. Several boat ramps are available at Gremlin, Methodist and Patterson Coves.

Water level measurements in this article were recorded at the end of April 2017 and are ever-changing. The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission has no management authority over water levels, but the Commission's fisheries division does establish fish stockings for each public water body across the state. Visit OutdoorNebraska.org for an updated list of stockings and the latest sampling reports.

Be sure to purchase a 2017 Park Permit before you visit any SRA. Out-of-state boaters will need to purchase a Nonresident Aquatic Invasive Stamp (AIS) for their boats. The stamp is available online at the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission website along with more information about each reservoir at OutdoorNebraska.org. ■

RED WILLOW SRA - PHOTO BY JULIE GEISER

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◀ This is a photo of a buck my grandfather, Herman Blankenau, shot in 1963. The boy in the picture is me. My grandpa hit this deer on a morning hunt along the Elkhorn River near West Point. After seeing the buck drop, he went to the spot but was surprised to discover the buck had somehow escaped. He returned to his home in Dodge and my father, uncle, and I accompanied him back to track after a trip to church (it was Sunday after all). After losing the blood trail, the group was gathered to discuss what to do next in the hopes of a recovery. At that point I saw the buck in some nearby brush, drew my cap pistol and opened fire at about two yards. The buck jumped to his feet and began to run when he was shot a second time – this time with mortal results. I was not yet four years old and it was the first deer I had ever seen. The buck scored 175% Boone and Crockett and, after 53 years, it remains the largest buck I have ever seen.

Grandfather was a native German and WWI vet (for Germany). He grew up wanting to hunt but due to restrictions on hunting in Germany, never did. When Nebraska opened its first deer seasons, he was very excited and always cherished the opportunity to hunt. Sometimes we take things like that for granted. Thanks much.

– Don Blankenau, Lincoln



◀ This photo was taken in 1953 near Talmadge, Nebraska, after a successful hunt. Pictured, left to right, is my father, Paul Grotrian; my uncle, Donald Grotrian; and my grandfather, Carl Grotrian.



I still have the kerosene lantern that is in the photo and many memories of hunting with my dad up and down the creek banks of southeastern Nebraska.

– Jim Grotrian, Plattsmouth



▶ This image was from a grouse hunt on the Peggy and Roy Spencer Ranch near Brewster. It was a nice, fall day in 1978. Pictured is Jon Welty and, myself, Charlie Sadler. Jon and I hunted many times over many years, and this was a really good one.

– Charles Sadler, Lincoln

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 1980. 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.

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Scandinavian-style Paddlefish Cakes

Flavored with fresh shallots, parsley and white pepper.

By Jenny Nguyen

The New Scandinavian Cooking show on PBS is one of the best cooking shows on television. On this show, the host typically cooks outside, and the recipes feature local, fresh ingredients from the Scandinavian region, including those that have been hunted, foraged or freshly caught.

One episode comes to mind: the chef, Andreas Viestad, is standing in a few feet of snow, in front of a log cabin with wood fire going behind him, and a deer hangs in the background. He's tending to a pot of his hunter's venison stew, and you can see his icy breath in the cold, Nordic air as he's conjuring up romantic words to describe the successful hunter returning from the woods and the virtues of cooking with wild game meats. During the episode, the chef is wearing only a town coat, scarf and a beaver hat for warmth – viewers can see why these people are related to the Vikings.

The "fiskekaker" episode, which I saw years ago, was equally memorable. This time, the host is cooking before a stunning backdrop of an icy, blue lake, somewhere in Norway or Finland on a bright, spring or summer day. He's grinding fresh pike with potatoes and adding three different herb combinations to get three flavors of fish cakes. All the recipes on this show seem so simple, but so fresh and inviting. My mouth watered, and I told myself I'd make Scandinavian fish cakes one day.

So there's another recipe down – in my head, I keep a bucket list of recipes that I need to learn before I die. I enjoy the challenge, but I also like to try new things. In many ways, the act of cooking another culture's recipes brings me to a more intimate understanding.

Servings: 4

Prep Time: 30 minutes

Cooking Time: 10 minutes

Ingredients:

- 1 pound of paddlefish or other



Scandinavian-style paddlefish cakes served over a bed of dandelion greens tossed with pear and champagne vinaigrette.

- white fish, boneless and skinless
- ½ pound of boiled russet potato, skinless
- ¼ teaspoon of ground nutmeg
- ½ tablespoon of all-purpose flour
- ½ cup of cold whole milk
- 1 egg
- 1 shallot, minced
- 2 tablespoon of fresh parsley, chopped
- ¼ teaspoon of white pepper
- 1 teaspoon of kosher salt or to taste
- ½ tablespoon of olive oil
- ½ tablespoon of butter
- Lime/lemon wedges

1. Pat fish dry with paper towels and cut into large chunks. In a food processor with the S-blade, pulse fish with potato a few times. Then add nutmeg and flour, and then pulse until well combined and you get the texture of ground meat. Next, add milk and egg. Pulse until mixture turns into a paste. Add more milk if mixture is too

dry. (For a smoother fish cake texture, grind fish and potatoes together in an electric meat grinder and mix other ingredients by hand.)

2. Transfer mixture to a mixing bowl and combine with shallot, parsley, salt and white pepper. Keep fish mixture cold.

3. In a skillet, heat butter and olive oil over medium heat. When pan is hot, scoop out fish paste with a large spoon and form into a plum-size patty. Drench hands in water first to reduce sticking. Cook fish cakes for 5-7 minutes on each side or until golden brown and cooked through. Serve fish with lime or lemon wedges and your favorite salad. ■

This recipe and photograph originally appeared on Jenny's Food for Hunters blog at foodforhunters.com.



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The Past and Present of Windmills

Why are windmills so often photographed? Perhaps it is a reminder of the past that still seems to carry such an important purpose in the present. Or perhaps it's simply the way that late afternoon light shines from its blades. Regardless of the reason, I am not alone with my thoughts on this photo subject.

At *NEBRASKAland Magazine*, we have a cloud-based photo database that houses thousands of images. From flora to fauna, landscapes to close-ups, our staff does its best to photograph everything it can throughout the state to encourage you to spend time outdoors.

The other day, while searching my own images, I saw this windmill photograph taken somewhere on the Nebraska/South Dakota line last summer while tubing on the nearby Niobrara River with friends. This picture was taken on one of my early-morning drives when everyone else was still sleeping.

I stopped to photograph it for no other reason than it was a windmill. And windmills, for some reason, need to be photographed, as proven by the 500-plus images of them stored in the *NEBRASKAland* online photo library.

On this day, I added a few more, including verticals and horizontals for good measure.

Upon further observation, I saw that the place where this particular windmill was manufactured was in San Angelo, Texas. It was in this small west Texas town that my wife and I first lived right out of college, where I was trying to cut it as a writer with the hopes of one day having a life-long career combining my two most important passions – writing and the outdoors.

And once again I realized why people perhaps photograph windmills so much: They remain a reminder of the past – regardless of what that link might be – that continue to carry an important purpose in the present.

Jeff Kurrus
April 9, 2017



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