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NEBRASKAland

January-February 2012



Strong north winds and freezing temperatures create a fantasy ice world along the south shore of Lake McConaughy. Photo by Bob Grier.

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A Look at Ash Hollow State Park • Make a Wish Hunt
Broken Bow School • Roger Welsch's Hunter Benefits
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NEBRASKAland

Volume 90, Number 1, January-February 2012

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Hardy made a name for himself as a leatherworker and sharpshooter in Hyannis at the turn of the last century, leading to a career as an exhibition shooter and Hollywood consultant. **BY JON FARRAR**

40 Crescent Lake - Finally Open for Fishing

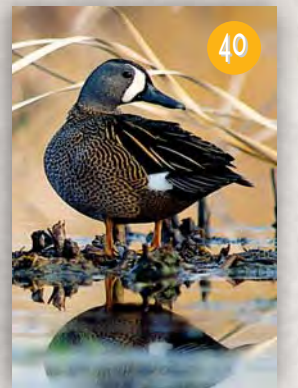
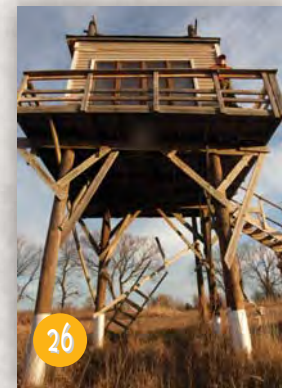
Finally completed late last year when the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission was able to obtain a lease on 87 acres to create the Crescent Lake Wildlife Management Area. **BY ERIC FOWLER**

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Cover: An eastern screech owl sits in the remnants of a hollowed out tree in Hall County, sunning itself on a cold winter day. Photo by Rick Rasmussen.
Opposite: Hoarfrost coats the upwind side of a sunflower stem on a cold winter morning. Photo by Eric Fowler.

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Battling Bucks

I really enjoyed the article in the October issue on camera traps. Recently I began hanging a camera on my uncle's land west of Fort Calhoun where I have bow and rifle hunted for about the past 10 years.

Using a mineral block to attract deer to my camera setup (I know that it's illegal to hunt over bait in Nebraska – I just use the camera and mineral block to see what's using the area), I've been able to capture some great images and thought I'd share this photo of two young bucks scrapping it out in early November. They put on a good show until they finally had enough and parted ways.

Cody Madsen
Lincoln, Nebraska

Just Visiting

We were camping at Eugene T. Mahoney State Park in October. My husband was relaxing and enjoying the beautiful weather by sitting outside and reading. Our dog was at his side. Fourteen wild turkeys came out of the woods and walked 10 feet in front of him. What an awesome sight!

Sharon Buckley
Bellevue, Nebraska

NEBRASKAland Visitor Letters

We want to thank all 68 readers that sent e-mails and letters for last

Thanks, always a fun search before diving into the good articles.
Solveig Knott
Grand Island, Nebraska

The visitor made his appearance on the bottom right of page 43. The visitor is a firefly.

What did the firefly say when the little child pulled his "lantern" off and put it on his finger as a bright shining ring?

"I'm delighted," said the firefly!!!
Phil Feese
Kearney, Nebraska

Once again it was a challenge when the new *NEBRASKAland* magazine arrived to see who could find the bug first.

The bug is a *Pyrallis* firefly found on page 43 of the December issue.

Keep up the good work. We thoroughly enjoy the photos and stories in *NEBRASKAland*.

Thanks again for a great magazine!
Irvin Reiber
Campbell, Nebraska

While I have never ice fished with Dave Fehlhafer, I have fished with his second place team partner, Don Cox, (page 43, tournament results column) and would not be at all surprised if he had used a firefly or similar imitation (shown next to Dave's name) as bait!

Ken Fankhauser
Kearney, Nebraska

issue's visitor, an *eastern firefly* that was on page 43 (see page 11 for the winner, rules and this issue's hint). Here are some of the responses we received:

I found a firefly (*Photinus pyralis*) checking out the fishing tournament results on page 43 of the December 2011 *NEBRASKAland*. Seems a bit cold for this fellow to be out, as we usually see them in the summer lighting up after dusk. Perhaps he would prefer to hang out with the bees or the cardinals, down south!



The visitor on page 43 in the lower right hand corner is very fitting for December and Christmas. We have a lightning bug or firefly there. Hope everyone at *NEBRASKAland Magazine* has a happy Thanksgiving and blessed holiday season.

Steve Tyler
Omaha, Nebraska

The eastern firefly (Photinus pyralis) is likely the most common firefly (or lightningbug) in North America and measures roughly ½-inch in length. Don't be fooled by the name: They aren't bugs; they're actually beetles. Fireflies get their common name because they are bioluminescent; they can create visible light with their bodies. Bioluminescence is caused by a chemical reaction within the body of the insect and is notable because it is a type of "cold light," producing virtually no heat. Fireflies flash their light as a form of communication, most often in their mating rituals. Males fly in a pattern distinct to each species, lighting up the luminous portion of their abdomen as they fly. Females will flash a response of their own. Eastern fireflies are nocturnal, and tend to be most active beginning at dusk and on into the night. The best "light show" can often be found over tall, unmowed grass, particularly grassy areas adjacent to trees.

Special thanks to Julie Van Meter, State Entomologist, Nebraska Department of Agriculture. Visitor image by Chris Helzer.
www.bugguide.net is a good site for identification

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

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COMMISSION OFFICES

Headquarters/Southeast District Office
2200 N. 33rd Street Lincoln, NE 68503
Phone (402) 471-0641

Northeast District Office
2201 N. 13th St. Norfolk, NE 68701
Phone (402) 370-3374

Southwest District Office
301 E. State Farm Rd. North Platte, NE 69101
Phone (308) 535-8025

Northwest District Office
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Phone (402) 332-3901

CONSERVATION OFFICERS

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Preliminary Data Shows Record November Deer Harvest

Nebraska saw a record November deer harvest in 2011, according to preliminary data received by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission. The harvest of 64,548 deer taken November 12-22 with firearm, archery and Season Choice permits was an increase of 865 from last year, which was also a record year.

Harvest in the Commission's

Northwest district was down by 429 deer compared to 2010, but the Southwest harvest was up by 830, the Southeast harvest was up by 141 and the Northeast harvest was up by 553.

Harvest information by species, sex, age and unit will be available following the close of the last deer season. The archery and muzzleloader seasons are open now through the end of the year, and Season Choice permit holders have until January 18 to fill their tags. Archery, muzzleloader and Season Choice permits are still available for most of the state.

Outdoor Message Plates

Pat Keslar's wife, Carmen, surprised him with his message plate a few years ago for Father's Day. The plate does not show Keslar's admiration for some kind of dinosaur, as his hunting buddy thought when he first saw it – it's testament to he and his wife's 30-plus years of raising Labrador retrievers at their Hyannis home and the 30 to 40 days each year Pat spends hunting pheasants behind them, including 29 years as a handler in Broken Bow's One Box Pheasant Hunt.

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) of it to Eric.Fowler@Nebraska.gov, along with your name, hometown and a brief description of the interests expressed on your license plate.



Upcoming Events



Here is a list of upcoming outdoor events across Nebraska. For more information about these and other events, visit the calendar page at www.OutdoorNebraska.org.

January 7

Project WILD – Focus on Winter

This will be a Project WILD workshop focusing on winter, animals' winter adaptations, and how to engage your students in learning outside during the winter.

9 a.m. - 3 p.m. To register, contact lindsay.rogers@nebraska.gov.

January 7

Beyond BOW Event – Snowshoeing Open to women 18 years of age and older, this class at Platte River State Park will teach participants about snowshoeing.

For more information and to register, contact Julia.Plugge@nebraska.gov or call 402-471-6009.

January 20

Crow Season

Season Dates: Jan. 20 - April 6.

Daily Bag Limit: None.

Possession Bag Limit: None.

Open Area: Statewide.

January 21-February 5

Light Goose Regular Season

Season Dates: Jan. 21. - Feb. 5.

Daily Bag Limit: 20.

Possession Limit: None.

Open Area: Statewide.

February 4-5

White-fronted Goose Season

Season Dates: Feb. 4 - 5, 2012.

Daily Bag Limit: 1

Possession Limit: 2

Open Area: Statewide.

For more information on hunting regulations and season, visit www.OutdoorNebraska.org.

PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS

NEBRASKA Pheasants Forever & Quail Forever EVENTS

Join the growing number of people who are making a difference for wildlife Habitat and Youth Education in America. Since inception in 1982, Pheasants Forever has had a monumental impact on upland conservation. Do your part by becoming a member today and you will ensure the future of the ringneck pheasant and other wildlife Forever!

Nebraska Banquet Dates

Date	Chapter	Location
01/21/2012	Great Plains PF	Holdrege
01/21/2012	Husker Covey QF	Adams
01/28/2012	Bazile Creek PF	Creighton
01/28/2012	Lewis & Clark PF	Bow Valley
01/28/2012	Otoe County PF	Nebraska City
02/11/2012	Lower Platte PF	Ashland
02/11/2012	Webster County PF	Blue Hill
02/18/2012	Little Blue River PF	Hastings
02/18/2012	Maple Creek PF	Howells
02/18/2012	Perkins County PF	Grant
02/24/2012	Cornhusker PF	Lincoln
02/25/2012	Cedar River Ringnecks PF	Greeley
02/25/2012	Rainwater Basin PF	Sutton
02/25/2012	Seward County PF	Seward
02/25/2012	Southwestern Nebraska PF	Imperial
03/02/2012	High Plains PF	Sidney
03/02/2012	Rock Creek PF	Fairbury
03/03/2012	Dodge County PF	Fremont
03/03/2012	Heritage PF	Alliance
03/03/2012	Lincoln Creek PF	Aurora
03/09/2012	Nemaha Valley PF	Johnson
03/09/2012	Wachtel Fur Immer QF	Eustis
03/10/2012	Boone County PF	Albion
03/10/2012	Corn Country PF	McCool Junction
03/10/2012	Dixon County PF	Newcastle
03/10/2012	Loup River PF	Ord
03/10/2012	Lower Elkhorn Valley PF	West Point
03/15/2012	Elkhorn Valley PF	Norfolk
03/16/2012	Logan Creek PF	Wayne
03/17/2012	Golden Prairie PF	Neligh
03/17/2012	Plains Sportsman PF	McCook
03/22/2012	Douglas County West PF	Elkhorn
03/23/2012	Platte County PF	Columbus
03/24/2012	Franklin County QF	Franklin
03/24/2012	Mile High PF	Kimball
03/24/2012	Washington County PF	Blair
03/30/2012	Prairie Creek PF	Fullerton
03/31/2012	Cass County PF	Plattsmouth
03/31/2012	Heartland PF	Omaha
03/31/2012	Niobrara Sportsman PF	Gordon
03/31/2012	Republican Valley PF	Cambridge
04/07/2012	Medicine Creek PF	Stockville
04/07/2012	Saline County PF	Crete
04/14/2012	Antelope Valley PF	Oshkosh
04/21/2012	Sherman County PF	Loup City
TBA	Prairie Hills PF	Kearney
TBA	Southeast Nebraska PF	Beatrice
TBA	Ponca Creek Ringnecks PF	Bristow



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Amack to Retire as Game and Parks Director

Nebraska Game and Parks Commission Director Rex Amack has announced his intent to retire in April 2012, the end of his current term.

Amack's 24 years at the helm of the 475-employee agency distinguishes him as the longest-serving director in Commission history.

"I am so grateful for the opportunity afforded me by the Commission to serve the citizens of this wonderful state," said Amack. "It is hard to imagine a more rewarding and meaningful career."

Amack thanked Commissioners for instilling in him their trust and lending him their support and friendship throughout the years. "I also want to acknowledge and thank those who I have been blessed to work shoulder to shoulder with each day. Our employees are results-oriented professionals who work hard to meet the Commission's mission of stewardship of the state's fish, wildlife, park and outdoor recreation resources. It has been an extraordinary honor."

A native of Red Cloud, Amack began his career with the Commission as a University of Nebraska intern in June 1967 working in the Information and Education department. Upon graduation with a bachelor of arts degree in May 1968, he joined the Commission as a full-time employee in the same department. In collaboration with the Nebraska Educational Television Network, Amack helped develop the Commission's Outdoor Nebraska television program, which he hosted for several years.

In 1975, Amack was promoted to chief of the Information and Education Division, and five years later he was promoted to assistant director of administration by then Commission Director Gene Mahoney. Following Mahoney's retirement in 1988, the Commissioners appointed Amack to a six-year term as director. He was later reappointed to successive six-year terms in 1994, 2000 and 2006.

Some of the major achievements that stand out during his tenure as director of the Commission include the developments of Eugene T. Mahoney and Smith Falls state parks, as well as the Calamus Reservoir Fish Hatchery; the bighorn sheep project; ongoing elk hunting opportunities; \$5 youth turkey and deer permits; the makeover of Ponca State Park; the Cornhusker Trap Shoot; the Open Fields and Waters hunting and fishing access program; the Recruitment, Development and Retention program for Nebraska youth; and the Becoming an Outdoors-Woman program.

Amack also has been immersed in conservation and parkland issues on regional and national platforms. He has twice served as president of the Midwest Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies and has served as president of the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies. Amack is currently president-elect of the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies.



Rex Amack

PHOTO BY DOUG CARROLL

See You Out There ... But Where?



Do you know where this
Nebraska photograph
was taken?
See answer at the bottom
of page 11.

PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS

"Useful, with a pleasant degree of fish odor"

BY DARYL L. BAUER

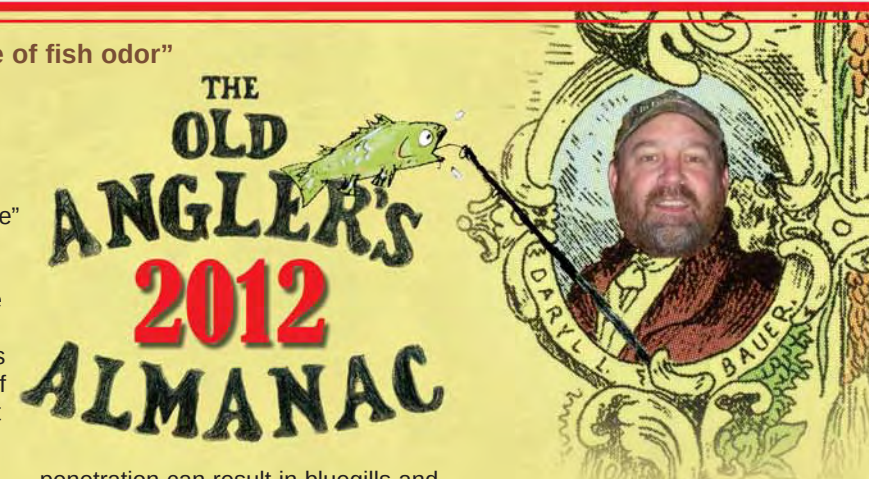
No one can predict how cold our winter will be nor how much ice we will have, but with at least an "average" winter, anglers should see one of Nebraska's best ice-fishing seasons in years! Water levels in many of the state's waters have rebounded after several years of drought and anglers can now start reaping the benefits of improved water conditions, excellent habitat conditions and the resulting increase in fish production.

• Catching Numbers - Big Water

Many of Nebraska's largest waters are reservoirs where water level fluctuations normally inhibit the production of panfish such as crappies, bluegills and yellow perch. However, on occasion these water fluctuations can result in an abundance of flooded terrestrial vegetation, producing "booms" in panfish populations. A number of Nebraska reservoirs have seen habitat conditions swing in favor of panfish in recent years and could produce some great ice-fishing this winter. Harlan County Reservoir should produce good numbers of crappies through the ice this winter, as well as Sherman Reservoir, which produces good crappie fishing most years. Oliver and Whitney reservoirs in the Nebraska Panhandle have good crappie populations right now, as do Willow Creek and Czechland in eastern Nebraska. Calamus Reservoir does not give up a lot of crappies through the ice, but can produce some quality fish. And, of course Merritt and Box Butte would be two of the best reservoirs in the state for pulling a variety of panfish through an ice hole.

• Catching Numbers - Small Water

Panfish are no doubt the "bread and butter" for ice anglers, and there are a host of small waters throughout Nebraska that are excellent panfish habitats. Ice anglers who can access private pits and farm ponds can catch both a mess of panfish for a meal of fresh fish as well as some trophy panfish for a quick photo and release. Interstate lakes in central Nebraska can have extremely clear water during the winter, which can make fish tough to catch, but targeting these lakes during periods of reduced light



penetration can result in bluegills and a variety of other panfish, such as crappies, redear sunfish and rock bass.

• Catching Big Fish

Panfish may be the bread and butter for ice anglers, but it sure is nice to slip a few large predator fish onto the ice as well (kind of like throwing a big ol' slab of deer salami on that sandwich). The best ice-fishing for large predator fish would no doubt be targeting northern pike on Nebraska's Sandhills lakes. Goose Lake would be a good bet for pike this winter, as well as several lakes on the Valentine National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) that have produced excellent ice-fishing for pike for a long, long time, such as Dewey, Pelican and Clear. Anglers should also consider fishing larger baits while panfishing through the ice on all Nebraska waters, as largemouth bass, walleye and occasionally channel catfish can be caught right along with the panfish.

• Trying Something New

The majority of winter fishing in Nebraska will be done while standing on top of frozen water, but not all of it – there are some open-water fishing opportunities that can be enjoyed on those winter days when it warms up a few degrees. The Gavins Point Dam tailwaters will produce some walleye and sauger all winter long, and after last summer's high flows on the Missouri River, that fishery should be particularly good. Bouncing a jig and minnow or jig and GULP Alive! minnow just off the bottom will catch those fish. Likewise, trout can be caught year-round from open water on Lake Ogallala or the East Branch of Verdigre Creek. On the Tri-County Canal in central Nebraska, a number of check

dams and reservoir inlets can produce some open-water walleyes or even sauger. Anglers can also catch some channel catfish and a variety of other species where the warm-water power plant discharge is released back into the cooling pond and into Sutherland Reservoir itself.

• Not Caring What You Catch

Often the best approach to ice-fishing is to just catch any fish, which is why panfish are such a popular ice-fishing target. With the clear water of winter and the reduced metabolism of fish, tackle down to lighter lines and smaller baits and then take it as it comes! Pick a body of water that has some good panfish and an angler can catch some larger predator fish right along with the panfish on the same baits. That "take it as it comes" approach can be used on just about any body of water where an angler can get on the ice this winter.

• Best Bet

Grab the ice-fishing gear and head for the hills – the Sandhills that is! There are a number of Sandhills lakes that should produce some excellent yellow perch, bluegill and black crappie this winter. Along with those panfish, anglers will have an excellent opportunity to catch some northern pike on some of those Sandhill lakes and some big, beautiful largemouth bass on almost all of them. Pelican, Dewey, Hackberry, Willow, Frye, Island, Goose, Crescent, Smith and Blue will be a few Sandhills lake names whispered by Nebraska ice anglers this winter.

*"The best time to fish is when
you have time to fish." — D.L.B.*

Prescribed Burn Training Workshops across the State

Workshop Type	Location	Date	Workshop Information
Basic	VFW, 126 East Main Hartington	Jan. 10, 2012 9:00 to 3:30	Registration fee of \$10 with lunch provided. Conducted by Pheasants Forever and Quail Forever and the Northeast Nebraska Prescribed Burn Association
Basic	UNL Extension, 444 Cherrycreek Road Lincoln	Jan. 12, 2012 3:30 to 9:00	Registration fee of \$10 with lunch provided. Conducted by Pheasants Forever and Quail Forever and the Tri County Prescribed Burn Association
Basic	Nielson Community Center, 200 Anna Stalp Ave. West Point	Jan. 14, 2012 9:00 to 4:30	Registration fee of \$10 with lunch provided. Conducted by Pheasants Forever and Quail Forever and the Elkhorn Valley Prescribed Burn Association
Basic	American Legion, 206 Sprague Street Rushville	Jan. 17, 2012 8:30 to 4:30	Free to the public with lunch provided. Conducted by Pheasants Forever and Quail Forever and Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory
Basic	Lower Platte North NRD, 511 Commercial Park Rd. Wahoo	Jan. 18, 2012 9:00 to 4:30	Registration fee of \$10 with lunch provided. Conducted by Pheasants Forever and Quail Forever
Basic	Loup County Community Center, 406 4th Street Taylor	Jan. 19, 2012 9:00 to 4:00	Registration fee of \$10 with lunch provided. Conducted by Pheasants Forever and Quail Forever
Basic	Thayer County Activity Center, fairgrounds Deshler	Jan. 20, 2012 9:00 to 4:00	Registration fee of \$10 with lunch provided. Conducted by Pheasants Forever and Quail Forever
Basic	Town Talk, 606 Patterson Street Cambridge	Jan. 23, 2012 9:00 to 4:00	Registration fee of \$10 with lunch provided. Conducted by Pheasants Forever and Quail Forever and the Southwest Nebraska Prescribed Burn Association
Basic	Scotia Community Building, 104 S. Main Street Scotia	Jan. 24, 2012 9:00 to 4:00	Registration fee of \$10 with lunch provided. Conducted by Pheasants Forever and Quail Forever and the Central Nebraska Prescribed Burn Association
Basic	Ansley Municipal Auditorium, 720 Douglas St. Ansley	Jan. 25, 2012 9:00 to 4:00	Registration fee of \$10 with lunch provided. Conducted by Pheasants Forever and Quail Forever and the Custer Prescribed Burn Association
Basic	Johnson Center, 509 Main Street Alma	Jan. 25, 2012 9:00 to 4:00	Registration fee of \$10 with lunch provided. Conducted by Pheasants Forever and Quail Forever and the South Central Nebraska Prescribed Burn Association
Basic	Brahmer's Steakhouse & Saloon, 39359 HWY 2 Thedford	Jan. 26, 2012 9:00 to 4:00	Registration fee of \$10 with lunch provided. Conducted by Pheasants Forever and Quail Forever
Basic	Farnam Fire Hall, 319 Main Street Farnam	Jan. 30, 2012 9:00 to 4:00	Registration fee of \$10 with lunch provided. Conducted by the Prescribed Burn Task Force
Basic	County Fairgrounds, 1002 Plum Creek Parkway Lexington	Jan. 31, 2012 9:00 to 4:00	Registration fee of \$10 with lunch provided. Conducted by the Prescribed Burn Task Force
Basic	Wood River Fire Department, 410 Green Street Wood River	Feb. 1, 2012 9:00 to 4:00	Registration fee of \$10 with lunch provided. Conducted by the Prescribed Burn Task Force
Basic	Loup City Community Building, 803 O Street Loup City	Feb. 2, 2012 9:00 to 4:00	Registration fee of \$10 with lunch provided. Conducted by the Prescribed Burn Task Force
Basic	The Gathering Place, 612 Howard Avenue St. Paul	Feb. 2, 2012 9:00 to 4:00	Registration fee of \$10 with lunch provided. Conducted by Pheasants Forever and Quail Forever and the Central Nebraska Prescribed Burn Association
Advanced	South Platte NRD, 551 Parkland Drive Sidney	Feb. 21, 2012 9:00 to 4:00	Registration fee of \$10 with lunch provided. Conducted by Pheasants Forever and Quail Forever and the Southern Panhandle Prescribed Burn Association
Basic	North Platte Community College-North Campus North Platte	March 1, 2012 9:00 to 4:00	Registration fee of \$10 with lunch provided. Conducted by Pheasants Forever and Quail Forever
Basic	Table Creek Golf Course, 5633 I Road Nebraska City	March 8, 2012 9:00 to 4:00	Registration fee of \$10 with lunch provided. Conducted by Pheasants Forever and Quail Forever

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Workshops
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Prescribed Burn
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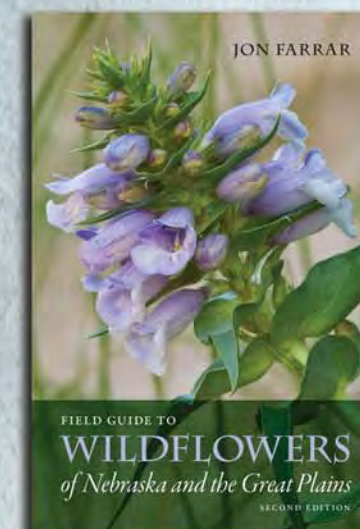
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Boating Safety Law Change Takes Effect January 1

Due to changes in boating law regulations last spring, as of January 1, 2012, any person born after December 31, 1985 who is operating a motorboat, including personal watercraft such as Jet Ski or Waverunner, must have completed a boating safety course and have proof of completion with them.

Nebraska boating safety certification may be obtained through a six-hour classroom course, or by home study with a proctored exam. Nonresident boaters may present certifications from their home state as long as it's from an approved course.

The minimum age to operate a motorboat in Nebraska is still 14 years of age. For available boating safety classes in your area, visit outdoor.nebraska.org/boating or call your local Nebraska Game and Parks Commission office.

Prescribed Burns Planned

The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission will conduct prescribed burns this winter to increase the diversity of plant species in grasslands and remove invasive woody plants. Some burns will be used to remove slash piles that remain from timber stand improvement practices.

Burns will be conducted, when conditions allow, at the following locations: Rose Creek and Flathead wildlife management areas (WMA) in Jefferson County, Meridian WMA in Thayer County, Lake Minatare and Wildcat Hills state recreation areas in Scotts Bluff County, Chadron State Park (SP) in Dawes County and Smith Falls SP in Cherry County.

Commercials Wanted

The Nebraska Wildlife Conservation Fund is hosting a commercial contest and encourages anyone who is interested in designing their own commercial to enter.

Participants are encouraged to create an original, creative 30-second commercial highlighting the Nebraska Wildlife Conservation Fund, then upload it to a YouTube account.

The deadline for entering the contest is 5 p.m. on April 15 and there are three separate categories that can be entered: Grades 3-6, Grades 7-12 and an Open category.

The best commercial of all three categories will be selected by a public vote and will run on major television stations across the state during the 2013 tax season. Commercials should be designed to raise awareness of the Wildlife Conservation Fund, help people better appreciate Nebraska's wildlife and encourage people to donate to the fund through their tax rebates or through the fund's web site.

For more information and complete contest rules, visit NebraskaWildlifeFund.org or e-mail at kristal.stoner@nebraska.gov or scott.bonertz@nebraska.gov. Music, images and video will be available on the commercial contest resources portion of the web page, but do not have to be used for any commercials entered in the contest.

NEBRASKALAND Visitor Winner and Hint

Last issue's winner of the *NEBRASKALAND* Visitor drawing was Rachel Oltjenbruns of Ceresco, Nebraska, who found the **eastern firefly** on page 43. 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 bug found in Nebraska that just happened to find its way onto one of the pages of our publication.

We will then gather the correct entries and draw one to win a *NEBRASKALAND* Magazine 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 5, 15 or 49.

Out of the Classroom and Into the Field

Text and photos by Doug Carroll



Broken Bow students show off a nice northern pike they caught through the ice on a field trip to Valentine Natinal Wildlife Refuge.

Schools teach their students a lot of things: Language arts, mathematics, science, social studies and other subjects too numerous to mention. Some of these are things they'll need in whatever career they eventually choose to pursue, but many are simple day to day living skills – how to balance a checkbook and live healthy lives, etc. Broken Bow Public Schools take this a little further than most – they give students a

hands-on opportunity to learn about the Nebraska outdoors, try a lifetime sport they might not already be familiar with, and create memories that will last far beyond their school years.

Learning and Remembering

Under the inky blueness of a cold, overcast, predawn January morning, a bright yellow school bus rolls down the highway, carrying a busload of nervous,

somewhat sleepy eighth-grade boys, a teacher or two, and several volunteers as they head northwest to Valentine National Wildlife Refuge and its mecca of great ice-fishing lakes.

Over the course of what promises to be a fun-filled day – fish or no fish, freezing cold or tolerable temperatures – the boys will learn about ice-fishing, the great outdoors, and themselves. All while having fun.

Held every year since 1995 (weather

permitting) the ice-fishing trip was started by Broken Bow Public Schools physical education teacher Kevin Foster as a way to get the kids out of class for a day and teach them a sport they might not otherwise have a chance to learn.

Despite Foster's death in a 2004 car accident, the annual field trip has continued to honor his memory and because "It's good for the kids," said Jerry Scott, a science teacher in Broken Bow.



Eighth-grade students celebrate the successful landing of a rainbow trout during an all-girls outing to Arnold Park

Scott, who helps with the trips and was a friend of Foster, said that despite the school's location in some of the best hunting and fishing areas in the state, many of students don't have much experience with outdoor sports:

"I would guess less than a fourth of the students have been fishing before. I fished and hunted with my dad since before I can remember, and with my own boys since they were old enough

to walk. The bonds that we have created are something that will never be broken. I haven't regretted for a second the time I've spent on the water or in the field with my boys or my students."

Usually a week or two before the scheduled day of the trip, Scott said, students get instruction at school on the basics of ice-fishing so they can get started as soon as they reach the ice. Because few if any of the kids have

their own equipment, most of what they use on the trip has been donated or loaned for the day by some of the many area outdoorsman who help with the event, such as Roger Carroll, a retired bus mechanic from Broken Bow, and Hank Linder and Don Cox, whom Scott described as "obsessive" ice fishermen.

"We couldn't do this without Hank, Don and the guys," said Scott. "They go above and beyond."

No matter what fishing success they have, said Scott, most participants come away with many new memories, whether it's of the one that got away, the one that didn't, or which team won the impromptu tug-of-war contest held on oh-so-slippery ice.

"It is really refreshing to see these students in a different light away from the classroom," said Scott. "Kids who think they are pretty tough in the hallways and classrooms aren't quite as tough on the ice. Then there are kids who are meek and mild in the classroom, but are animals on the ice."

Something for the Girls

Not to be left out, each spring (again, weather permitting) the eighth grade girls at Broken Bow also get the chance to learn about fishing – except they don't have to drill any ice holes and usually don't have to bundle up quite as much as the boys do as they chase trout at one of many bodies of water that the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission stocks with rainbow trout in the fall and spring.

Rachelle Haines, who teaches physical education in Broken Bow, said that while fishing is taught as part of the lifetime sports portion of the school's PE curriculum (eighth-grade PE in Broken Bow is taught separately by different teachers, thus the separate trips), students are allowed to opt out if they wish. Not many do, however.

"Each year many of the girls say that they do not want to go, but once we head home, they say they had a great time," said Haines.

While some of girls have fished before and have their own equipment, for many this trip is their first real



Hank Linder demonstrates his jigging technique through the ice at Valentine NWR.



Baiting a hook is one of several things students get to experience during their outdoor adventures.

fishing experience. Using equipment loaned by the Commission and others, Haines and volunteers such as Don Wolford of Broken Bow teach the girls how to set up their equipment, show them how to cast and then answer any questions they might have, including how to unhook fish.

"It's a great experience for the girls – they seem to love the trip, have fun enjoying nature and come back with lots of great fishing stories," said Haines. "As the teacher, I think it is a lot of fun to take kids out of the traditional classroom and let them experience one in the outdoors."

Start Them Early

As great as their eighth-grade field trips are, those events are far from the only outdoor experience that Broken

Bow students get to try out: Sixth- grade students get to spend an overnight trip at the State 4-H camp in Halsey, where they experience a variety of outdoor education opportunities, and Broken Bow seventh graders travel to Calamus Reservoir to get a tour of the dam and fish hatchery before stopping to tour Ft. Hartsuff State Historical Park on the way back to school. Broken Bow is also one of the more than 150 Nebraska schools that take part in the National Archery in the School program, which teaches target-style basic archery skills to students in fourth through twelfth grades.

Although there may be other schools in Nebraska who take their students out on similar ventures, neither Scott nor Haines are aware of them. Which is a shame, said Haines, who added that although the trips don't necessarily

make lifetime anglers out of the students, they are a great experience for the kids, especially if their families are not the "outdoors" type.

Scott agreed: "I feel that the ice-fishing and trout fishing is an attempt to get kids to appreciate nature," said Scott. "Most will probably never ice fish again, but they will go away with a better understanding of nature. The more they see the more they know.

"Many of the kids tell me it is the best field trip they make in school. Some years the weather just doesn't cooperate. I've had parents comment to me they were disappointed that their younger child didn't get the experience that an older brother had.

"I really appreciate the fact that our administration has been so supportive, and that our students have the opportunity to get outside the classroom." ■

Ash Hollow

An Oasis on the Trail

Photos and text by Eric Fowler

From the air, two paths are plainly visible leading north from the tablelands between the North and South Platte rivers into Ash Hollow. One is paved with asphalt. The other is a rut filled with little bluestem and sideoats grama. Those traveling the former would be wise to stop at Ash Hollow State Historical Park and learn about the latter, which was created by the wheels of wagons carrying emigrants down the Oregon and California trails throughout much of the 1800s.



A neighboring rancher started putting worn-out cowboy boots (opposite) atop fence posts along Highway 26 in Ash Hollow in the 1960s. Others started adding their own and boots now line the highway through most of the valley.

Accented by little bluestem in its reddish fall tint, ruts created in the 1800s by wagons traveling the Oregon-California Trail lead north down a ridgetop toward Windlass Hill and Ash Hollow, both part of Ash Hollow State Historical Park near Lewellen.

About 1,400 vehicles a day follow Nebraska Highway 26 through Ash Hollow, a narrow, two-mile-long wooded canyon. Some of those modern travelers might think they are on a tight, gotta-get-there, schedule, but consider the travelers of yesteryear: The wagon trains couldn't leave Independence, Missouri, until May, when the prairie grasses needed to sustain their teams of oxen, horses or mules and other livestock greened up. While the spring-fed stream and shade made Ash Hollow a good place to camp, settlers couldn't stay long – it took



Ash Hollow State Historical Park is located on Highway 26, three miles south of Lewellen or 30 miles northwest of Ogallala. The main grounds are open from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., April 1 through October 31. The park's visitor center is open from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. on weekends from Memorial Day weekend through Labor Day, and to groups by appointment. The south portion of the park, including Windlass Hill, is open year-round.



Above: Decked out in period gear for their parts in the annual Ash Hollow Pageant, LeDene and Larry Rutt of Chappell and Garnet and Ron Storer of Lewellen walk a park trail once traversed by prairie schooners. The stone walls, often mentioned in pioneer diaries, were formed by sediments carried east from the Rocky Mountains before the Ice Age and were dubbed the Ash Hollow Formation by a geologist in 1850s.

Left: Park Superintendent Jeff Uhrich walks along spring-fed Ash Hollow Creek, one of many reasons pioneers had to stop in the draw. "This is good sweet water; we have had alkali and nothing was good," Keturah Belknap wrote in an 1848 journal entry. While lessened by groundwater development, the creek still flows most of the year.



four to six months to reach their West Coast destination. Dawdle on the trail and winter might beat you there, as it did the infamous Donner Party in 1846. Some had no choice, though, needing time to repair their wagons following a rough ride down Windlass Hill where, one pioneer said, "the road hangs a little past the perpendicular!"

"Here we were obliged, from the steepness of the road, to let the wagons down by ropes . . . The bottom of Ash Creek is tolerably well wooded, principally with ash and some dwarf cedars . . . traces of the great tide of emigration . . . plainly visible in remains of camp fires, in blazed trees covered with innumerable names . . . total absence of all herbage." - Howard Stansbury, July 3, 1852.



Kathy Mills of Glenwood, Iowa, her husband Bob, and grandchildren Bob, Carter and Josah, took a short detour to visit Ash Hollow and walk in the wagon ruts on Windlass Hill while vacationing in 2010. Eight of Mills' grandparents, five generations removed on her family tree, passed the same point while on the Oregon-California Trail between 1849 and 1864. She said only one made to their destination, the rest "tied up" in Idaho or Utah. She owns a quilt her grandmother, Mary Peterson Burt, made and carried on the trail in 1864.



Ash Hollow contains a wealth of human, geological and paleontological history, much of which is on display at the park's visitor center, including fossilized remains of prehistoric rhinos, mastadons and turtles. In a rock shelter near the center, archeologists peeled away layers on the floor to find evidence left by four distinct cultures of Native Americans during a 1,700-year period.

While school tours add some bustle to the park in spring and fall and most visitors stop during the summer months, there's usually not enough at any one time to disrupt the peace and quiet. Things were much different during a three-week span in late-May and early June back in the mid- to late 1800s, when the area was an important camp on trails headed west. The migration started slowly with fur traders and missionaries. The first wagon train passed through in 1841, and a few hundred to a few thousand people followed the trail each year until the 1849 discovery of gold in California opened the floodgates. In 1850, the height of the migration, 65,000 people headed west, sending an average of 2,500 people, 600 wagons and 10,000 animals through Ash Hollow each day. Wagon trains still followed the trail through the 1880s, long after the Union Pacific Railroad opened the west to anyone who could afford the fare. When all was said and done, roughly 500,000 people passed through Ash Hollow.



When wood was not available, homesteaders used prairie sod to build houses. A soddy built in 1967 at the base of Windlass Hill in Ash Hollow SHP is a popular stop for park visitors, including Don and Lynne Bender of Skull Valley, Arizona. The remains of the 1899 homestead dwelling of Reverend Dennis B. Clary sit behind the sod house.



First held in 1967 in conjunction with the Nebraska Centennial, and held Father's Day weekend each year since 1993, the annual Ash Hollow Pageant, presented by local actors and actresses, is a whimsical and serious look at life on the trail with skits, songs and readings from pioneer diaries. The first pageant drew 25,000; today's draws about 600 a night for its two night run.



A pre-pageant dinner includes succulent, cut-with-a-fork roast beef and fry bread, best devoured with butter and honey. Both the pageant and dinner are presented by the Lewellen chapter of Volunteers of America.

Each June since the 150th anniversary of the Oregon Trail was celebrated in 1993, folks have gathered in the hollow to celebrate the past with the Ash Hollow Pageant. The pageant recognizes the hard times pioneers faced on their 2,000-mile journey, which at this point in the trail was only one-third complete. They had already faced scorching heat and thunderstorms, and endured dust stirred by wagon and stock. Many succumbed to cholera, including Rachel E. Pattison, who died June 19, 1849, and is buried in the Ash Hollow Cemetery. Here they could relax, if only for a night, resupply at one of four trading posts, and even leave a letter at a U.S. Mail station to be carried back east. As Merrill Mattes wrote in Great Platte River Road: "In a country otherwise devoid of noteworthy features, Ash Hollow, with its high white cliffs, flower beds, oasis-like patches of trees and shrubbery, and beneficent clear springs, is an outright marvel."



Cynthia Miller and Lynn McGaha donned makeup facial hair to play parts as men in the pageant.

Barn Owl Sighting

Text by Doug Carroll, photos by Jana Linder

Just over a year ago, Jana Linder of Obert and her family were at their cabin cleaning out a barn when her then 12-year-old son, Cody, discovered a barn owl nest at the bottom of an old, empty grain bin.

Returning weekly to photograph the young owlets, Linder wasn't always able to get close enough to photograph the young birds, as the adults sometimes wouldn't let her near the grain bin entrance, but the photographs she did get provide a glimpse of one of Nebraska's prettiest owls.

According to Joel Jorgensen, nongame bird program manager with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, barn owls are somewhat rare in northeast Nebraska, but are found in larger numbers in southern and western parts of the state, although they are considered uncommon even there.

A medium-sized owl, the barn owl (Tyto



An adult barn owl (inset) sits on the seven eggs that were laid at the bottom of a grain bin.

alba) has a white or mostly white underside, tawny colored back and a heart-shaped, white face. Barn owls have excellent low-light vision and can easily find prey at night by sight, but their ability to locate prey by sound alone is reported to be the best of any animal that has ever been tested – they can catch mice in complete darkness in the lab or hidden by vegetation or snow out in the real world.

The barn owl's common name refers to their use of man-made structures such as barns for hunting, roosting and nesting. Very beneficial to man, their diet is largely made up of small mammals such as mice and other rodents.

Linder said the owls entered and left the bin from a small opening near its bottom, close to where the grain auger would go when the bin was being used. Seven eggs were laid, but only two hatched.

Linder said she was able to get a look at the young birds when they were at the flying stage, but wasn't able to capture them on camera. "It's kind of scary when



Out of the seven eggs, only two hatched.



Almost bald at birth, young barn owls grow quickly and soon are covered in down.



Almost entirely nocturnal, a tawny colored adult barn owl leaves its grain bin nest site.

an owl flies out at you from a hole you're trying to look in and shoot pictures!"

If you have concerns or problems with owls or other raptors, contact Raptor Recovery Nebraska, a nonprofit organization that rehabilitates orphaned or injured raptors. In eastern Nebraska call (402) 994-2009. For central and western Nebraska the number is (308) 750-3816.

First of Many

Text and photos by Jeff Kurrus

An opening day firearm deer hunt becomes a special event for a boy, his family, and the community around him.

“Cayden, it’s time to get up, buddy,” said Ryan McConnell, reaching over and nudging his 11-year-old son on the second day of the November firearm deer season. “There’s a gigantic buck standing out in the field.” But Cayden didn’t fall for his dad’s lie, so Ryan nudged him again, not unlike many other father/son interactions before an early morning hunting trip.

Except this was no ordinary trip, and rousing his son was the least of Ryan’s concerns. More important, obviously, was the inoperable tumor in Cayden’s brain, the one discovered in early August of 2011 that had rendered his son’s left arm paralyzed and added a limp to his walk. An evil mass that had forced Cayden to face a mountain of

pills, radiation and chemotherapy in an effort to thwart the cancer’s progress, which had, in a very short time, attempted to strip every ounce of normalcy from his life.

Cayden’s concerns, however, were different that morning. Yeah, he really didn’t like the way one of the pills tasted, wasn’t fond of the headaches and upset stomach that his new medicines caused, and definitely wasn’t in favor of needing help to put on clothes or eat his dinner.

But these were only minor inconveniences as compared to his main concern – being able to position his rifle quick enough, and make his shot steady enough, to ensure that any buck that walked into the field he was overlooking would hit the ground when he squeezed the trigger.



Cayden McConnell looks out his deer stand window as his dad Ryan looks on.



A deer hunting “hotel” of sorts was the location from where Cayden shot his first white-tailed buck in Gage County.

The Hotel

When Cayden finally sat up that Sunday morning, it was following his second night sleeping in Gage County landowner Rex Adams’s deer hunting “hotel” – an elevated wooden blind complete with two beds, multiple shooting windows and a 25-foot

vantage point overlooking hay fields, winter wheat food plots, and thick cedar draws – just the kind of habitat that keeps big bucks in an area all year long.

The pairing between Rex and the McConnell family came by way of Cayden’s uncle, Jim Hartig. “He [Jim] told me about Cayden’s situation and

that he could get Cayden a doe,” said Rex, “but he didn’t have the type of spot that had great odds for getting a shot at a buck.” Jim also informed Rex that while Cayden had shot a doe before, he was hoping to get his first antlered deer.

So Rex donated access to his own land in Gage County, as well as his son

Frosty’s best hunting spot, for the opening weekend of the firearm season to give Cayden a better opportunity to shoot a buck. And opportunities he would have.

Throughout the first day, multiple bucks entered the field that Cayden and his dad were watching, but not one shot was fired – two small bucks moved



Host Rex Adams (left), Ryan McConnell, and Cayden McConnell took a break from hunting to share a few moments during the middle of the opening day of the firearm deer season. From this stand location, the McConnells were able to look out at more than 80 acres of food plots, grass fields and cedar draws in an attempt to harvest Cayden's first buck. During their nearly two-day hunt, the father and son saw more than 50 deer from this spot.



A small buck approaches the deer decoy from behind.

across the field too quickly for Cayden to position himself, and one large buck came in near dark but only allowed the young hunter a few moments to find him in the scope before quickly disappearing. And then there was the spike that stayed in the field for several minutes, seemingly asking, nearly begging, to be shot. "Some deer are just meant to be taken," said Rex, who was acting as a spotter on the roof of the deer stand.

Cayden thought differently. "Not what I was looking for," he said to the adults near him after the hunt that night. They couldn't help but smile at the young hunter who, after an eventful opening day, was content with dinner, a shower and a good night's sleep in the deer hotel in preparation for day two.

Support

As Cayden drifted off to sleep, probably with antlers filling his dreams, calls poured in to Rex's phone. "No, not yet," he told the first caller. "We'll be back out tomorrow," he said to another. "Uh-uh," he said to a third. The calls, and his response, barely changed from one conversation to the next, for Cayden's hunt had now become dinnertime fodder for folks all across eastern Nebraska, reminiscent of the reaction Rex had first gotten from local outdoor enthusiasts weeks before the hunt.

"I just started asking for help, and folks started helping," said Adams. Free hats, jackets, pants, a bow, a shotgun, a rifle, a muzzleloader, gift certificates, deer processing and mounting, and cash for Cayden to spend however he wanted – the multitude of donations exemplified the

types of people the outdoor world has at its core.

But this is not surprising to anyone who hunts or fishes – tell a fly angler you're introducing a kid to 10s and 2s, and he'll hand you a dozen homemade dry flies. Tell a bowhunter you have a little boy wanting to learn about compound bows, and he's likely to give the kid his old bow as a starter. Tell a trap shooter that your daughter loves to pull the trigger, and they may offer to take her to the local range.

Many hunters and anglers know their roles, and understand how important it is to make sure the next generation keeps the outdoor passions alive after they are gone. Which is why Rex had multiple offers for other people to take Cayden hunting that weekend, and why the donations came easy from people of so many different backgrounds. "Rifleman, archers, shotgunners – everyone came together," said Adams.



Located in southeastern Nebraska, Gage County has a large population of whitetailed deer as well as what seems like an even larger population of outdoor enthusiasts willing to take time out for a little boy relatively new to the sport of hunting.



Sportsmen from various outdoor groups in Gage County came together to provide the McConnell family with a memorable opening day hunt, donating various outdoor-related products to make sure that this was just one of many hunts for young Cayden.



Cayden holds the buck’s leg as Frosty Adams begins to field dress the deer.

“And I have repeatedly seen this aspect from these folks throughout the years.” But even though all these people had stepped forward, none of them could make a buck stand still long enough in range for Cayden to shoot. That power was out of everyone’s hands.

The Buck

As soon as it was light enough to see Sunday morning, Cayden and his dad heard a *tap, tap, tap* on the roof above. Frosty was back at his usual stomping grounds, sitting atop the same spot that he had frequented since he was a boy. This time, however, the rules were a bit different. While Frosty had free reign over every deer that walked into the upper fields surrounding the hotel, young Cayden would take first shot at any buck in his field. Cayden and his dad looked out every window, but didn’t see anything. Frosty tapped louder. “There he is,” Ryan said. Moments later, “He’s a buck,” was voiced by both father and son. Even in the just-breaking day, antlers could be seen.

Cayden stuck his gun barrel out the window as the deer approached the deer decoy that the Adams’ had set out the day before and again that morning. The buck’s head lowered as he approached, coming within feet of the likeness. With his dad helping him steady it, Cayden held the rifle with one arm as the buck circled the decoy. The deer stopped, as did the rest of the world. Cayden’s shot echoed against the walls of the blind. The buck leapt into the air, obviously hit, and ran into the nearby grass, disappearing from sight. “You busted him,” Ryan said to his son, taking the rifle. Cayden pumped his fist. “Yes!” But 30 minutes later, there was no fist pumping. Three sets of eyes looked down at the ground near the decoy, across the field and into the grass. Not a single drop of blood could be found.

The Search

Shortly after Cayden’s hunt, he would begin a 33-week session of chemotherapy, which works by killing

cancer cells and combating their spreading. However, “chemo” can’t differentiate between harmful cancer cells and the body’s healthy cells. Therefore, the process is very hard on the body, resulting in fatigue, loss of appetite, frequent vomiting and possibly worse. His hunting days, once this began, would probably end for awhile. It is a process that is very challenging for people of all ages, and would prove especially difficult for a child. The day after the hunt, Cayden would be taken to Denver to begin this ordeal, thus leaving him with this one last day to hunt ... for awhile. Therefore, with eyes to the ground, this search for blood would be the most important that any in this group had ever been apart of.

Reds

Look at a field from a distance after the green of summer goes away and it appears brown and drab. Look closer, however, and you will see a

myriad of colors not the least bit recognizable from more than a few feet away. One of the colors that presents itself repeatedly is red – grass blade edges burn red, orange sunrise shadows on dead leaves create blood-colored spots, and various pieces of brown grass turn shades of yellow, black, brown ... and red. Post-shot searches for liquid red often include grass-stained knees and the licking of leaves. These times are often filled with the feeling of trepidation and lost opportunity. But all it takes is one drop, a speck, and the entire trail can open up in a way no onlooker might think possible. No blood had been found for more than 30 minutes, so both Frosty and Ryan searched the closest nearby canyon for a body. Rex, meanwhile, was on his way from home to join the group after being notified of the situation by Frosty. And while the sun had just recently risen, it was already getting fearfully close to dark in Rex’s mind. When Rex finally arrived, however, he had just missed the smallest, and most important, voice speak up. “Blood,” Cayden had said seconds before, pointing to the ground near his dad. Five minutes later, the group was standing over top of Cayden’s first buck. Hunting is a lot tougher when you’re hoping someone else does well, as this group confirmed, but it’s also so much sweeter when it actually comes to fruition. Which is why there was no need to coax smiles from this group of hunters. After a flurry of photographs and the story re-capped from everyone’s angle, Cayden looked down at the buck he would be showing off the rest of the day. “He would have been a really nice one next year,” he said. “He’s a really nice one this year,” Rex replied, but he and everyone else in the group understood Cayden’s comment. While this was the end of this year’s hunt, Cayden was thinking in true deer hunter fashion – the next hunt. For this buck was just the start of something very, very special for a young boy. ■

Next Year



Cayden poses with the buck shot on opening weekend of the firearm season. “He would have been really nice next year,” Cayden said, the sign of a hunting career only at its beginning.

The McConnell family would like to thank the following for their contributions to this hunt:

- Beatrice Gun Club
- Behrens Meat Plant
- Big Indian Archers
- Blue River Archery
- Browning Firearms
- Buck Commander
- Casey’s in Wymore
- Dollar Store in Wymore
- Ducks Unlimited
- Kevin Haskamp
- Nebraska Bowhunters
- NGPC
- Nikon
- Oregon Trail
- Patch & Powder
- Pheasants Forever
- RD’s Liquor
- Rex Adams and his Family
- Scheels
- Super Foods in Wymore
- Whitetails Unlimited
- Wild Turkey Federation
- Wymore Express
- Wymore Oil



A.H. “Captain” Hardy

Saddle Maker & Marksman Extraordinaire

By Jon Farrar

Hardy made a name for himself as a leatherworker and sharpshooter in Hyannis at the turn of the last century, leading to a career as an exhibition shooter and Hollywood consultant.

This is how the story goes. It was published in *Grant County – Its Friends and Neighbors*, and in other publications. It was penned by the story’s principal participant – Albert Howard Hardy.

“I had worked several months in a saddle shop in Omaha and had arranged for another job in Mike Elmore’s saddle shop in Alliance,” wrote Hardy. It was 1895, and he was traveling with his older brother, Elmer, who was going west at the same time to take a job on the Oregon Short Line. Elmer had “railroad letters” that he believed would allow both to travel

without paying. All went well until Whitman, when the railroad’s “roadmaster” boarded.

“The conductor said he was afraid to carry us so we contacted the head brakeman, who told us every car on the train was sealed but he would permit us to ride on the ladders if we gave him 85 cents each,” Hardy continued. “This we declined to do and determined to ride anyway.” The brothers hopped on the train before it gained much speed leaving Whitman. “Going through Hyannis, the train started to slow up. I noticed a brakie [brakeman] crawling back toward me with a lantern under his coat and felt apprehensive.

Anticipating his intention, my six-shooter was ready. And when he came even with me he let out an oath and with his lantern tried to knock me off. A shot on either side of his head changed his mind and he ran back to the engine.”

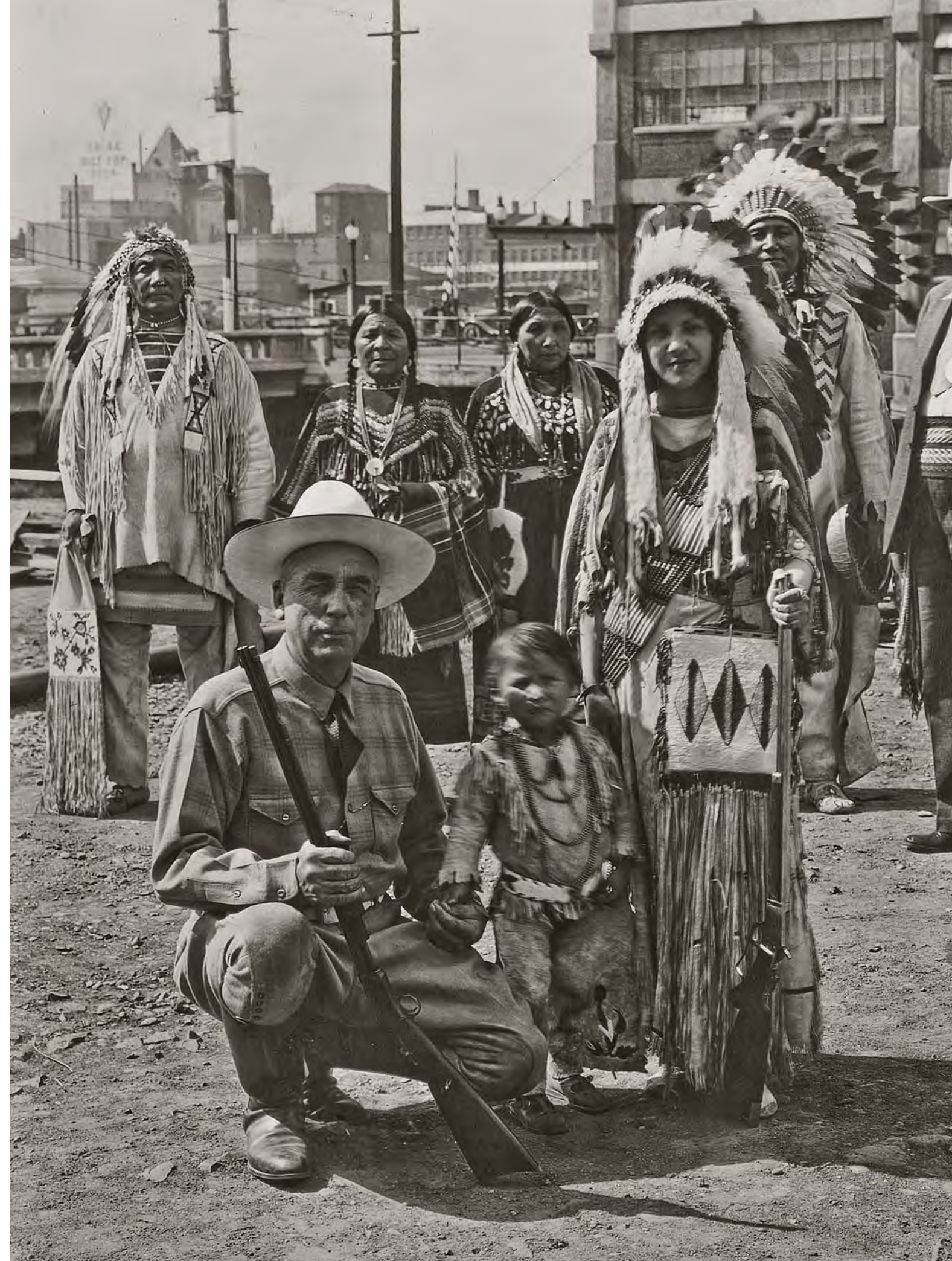
Elmer then fired two shots in the air, the brothers’ signal to get off the

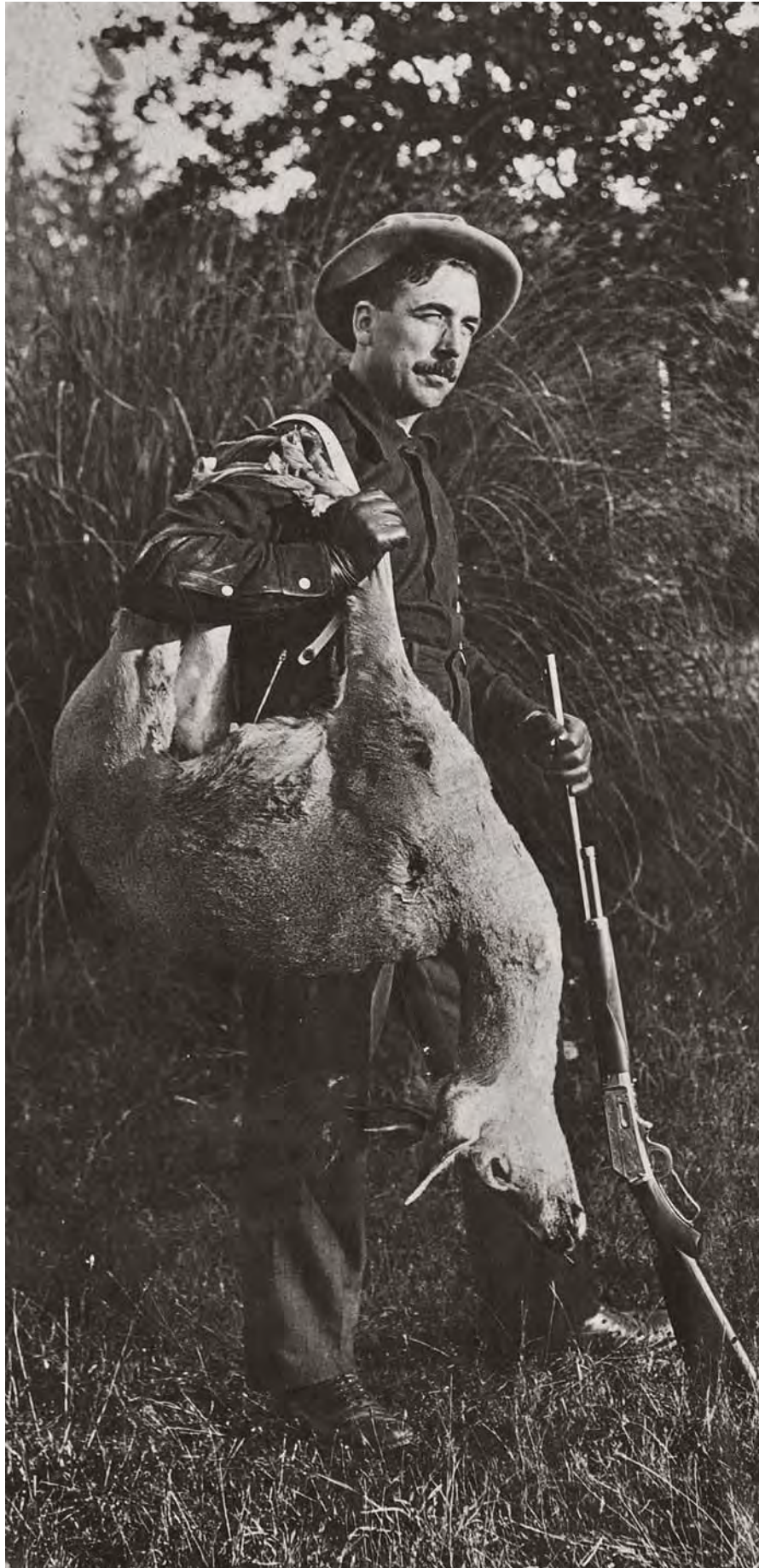
train. That same night they hitched a ride on another train to Alliance. The next day, told the sheriff was looking for them, the brothers hid their revolvers and went to find him. Elmer was arrested but not Albert, as he was underage. Both were taken back to Hyannis. Because it was months before the fall trial term and Hyannis had no jail, Elmer was put in the custody of the sheriff, who was also happened to be the local blacksmith, and put to work. With financial assistance from the county judge and others, Albert was set up in a small shop repairing and making saddles.

When it came time for the trial, the Burlington Northern Railroad sent a fleet of lawyers to Hyannis to make a showcase that would discourage other “hobos” from hitching rides. It was a particularly good opportunity, as shots had been fired at railroad employees. The Hardy brothers engaged the services of Alliance attorney Billy Mitchell.

“When I took the stand and testified that it was I and not Elmer who did the

Some of Hardy’s leatherworking tools, shown here on a saddle fender he fashioned, along with other memorabilia, are on display at the Grant County Historical Society Museum in Hyannis. From 1904 into 1938, he was an exhibition shooter for the Peters Cartridge Company and traveled widely. While doing an exhibition in Spokane, Washington in 1935, Hardy posed with Blackfeet Indians for a photograph. The caption noted the girl to his left holding a rifle was a “crack shot.”





shooting and that it was done in self-defense to keep from being knocked off a speeding train (then a penitentiary offense), and that Elmer had fired two shots in the air later as a signal to leave the train they [the lawyers] realized they had been lied to.

“Billy Mitchell spent very little time in presenting the defense, simply requesting Judge Thompson to grant an unusual request – adjourn court to outside of the hall (there was no courthouse then) so that he might prove that if either of us had attempted to kill the brakeman he would not have been there to testify. The request was granted and we proceeded to do our stuff. We each held an object in one hand while the other shot it out. Cards were cut in two edgewise, a postage stamp on an envelope held at 20 feet covered the next three shots. It was a gala day in Hyannis and the hall was packed with cowmen from miles around.”

The jury returned a not guilty verdict in less than five minutes, Hardy wrote. An account of the trial was reported in the *New York World* newspaper. Other newspapers picked it up, or wrote their own accounts. Letters began arriving asking Hardy to put on shooting exhibitions at fairs and carnivals, which he did. A fluke, being thrown off a freight train, had determined the direction of Hardy’s life.

Youthful Shooter

Hardy was born May 6, 1876 on a farm near Leigh, Nebraska in Platte County. He had three brothers and four sisters. Hardy’s interest in firearms surfaced early in his life, but his parents did not approve of them. Before he was 10 years old he covertly owned a .22-caliber rifle and a .32-caliber revolver. But his hidden passion for shooting ground to a screeching halt when he took his rifle to school, it was confiscated by a teacher, and his parents notified.

Hardy wrote he hunted ducks and grouse for the market while living in Hyannis, but little is known if he hunted for sport once he was on the exhibition circuit. Likely he did as a guest of admirers, or at the request of the Peters Cartridge Company for advertising.

“My mother had a horror of a gun,” Hardy wrote, “and when she discovered the rifle and revolver, which I had always kept in the barn, she proceeded to bury both in an old cave; by the time I found them they were ruined with rust. My heart was broken.”

Elmer secretly gave Hardy “an old worn-out Colt .32-20 repeater” that “would not shoot twice in the same place.” Hardy competed in turkey shoots with the rifle, but never won. He eventually put together enough money, \$16, to buy a new .32-20 rifle. He won the first six turkeys put up at a shoot and was asked to stay out of the next round. “My mother, who was a devout church member, finally told me that if I was determined to shoot all the time I must promise never to smoke, chew or drink, and she would let me shoot to my heart’s content.” Hardy agreed, and kept the promise his entire life.

At the age of 16, Hardy took an interest in the violin and became good enough to play in a small band, earning as much as 75 cents a night if dancers were generous in their donations. Hardy’s “fiddling money” paid for his practice ammunition.

Saddle Maker

In 1893, when Hardy was seventeen years old, he moved to Omaha to work as an apprentice in a harness shop, learned to make saddles and harnesses, and “hand tool” leather. In less than a year, though, struck with wanderlust, Hardy accepted a job with a saddle shop in Alliance. It was on that trip west that Hardy had the run in with the railroad brakeman, an event which lead to him

setting up a saddle-making and leatherwork shop in Hyannis. When business was short, he hired out to ranchers, and he later wrote he hunted “gray wolves” for their bounties and shot ducks and grouse for the eastern market. Hyannis was one of the biggest shipping points of game from the Sandhills in the 1890s. With what little money was left over from supporting himself, Hardy continued practicing shooting. “One year I recall having shot up eleven cases of .22 short cartridges alone in practice, which is 110,000 rounds,” wrote Hardy in *Grant County – Its Friends and Neighbors*.

During those years in Hyannis, Hardy was frequently asked to put on sharp-shooting exhibitions at

celebrations in the region.

In 1896, Hardy and friend Charlie Haney rode horseback 135 miles cross-country to North Platte to see the Buffalo Bill Wild West Show and deliver horses needed to put it on. Hardy was smitten with the exhibiton shooting of Cody, Cody’s sharpshooter foster son Johnnie Baker, and Annie Oakley. Cody encouraged Hardy to stay with his shooting, and in time a fast friendship would develop between the two men. When he returned to Hyannis he intensified his practice, spending all the money he made playing the fiddle on cartridges. He married one of the local schoolteachers in 1898, and their first child was born two years later.

Hardy seemed to be settling down in Hyannis, but that same year, Captain Will Bartlett, an exhibition shooter for Peters



Hardy learned to make saddles during a year spent in Omaha when he was 17 years old. He made saddles and did other leatherwork the rest of his life. The saddle shown here has been repaired, and is on display at the Grant County Historical Society Museum.

FREE EXHIBITION!

By Captain A. H. HARDY
One of the World's Greatest Marksmen



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You Can Shoot
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Confidence



THIS exhibition will include a remarkable number of difficult shots with rifle, revolver and shotgun. Also a lecture on practical and safe methods of using firearms. It will be intensely interesting, and also of real educational value to both grown-ups and youngsters. Send the boys that they may learn what to do and what not to do when handling firearms.

How to develop your marksmanship—how to become an expert will be shown by this famous shooter.

This free program is for the purpose of demonstrating the great accuracy and efficiency of

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The Peters Cartridge Company, and other ammunition and firearm manufacturers, employed exhibition shooters to not only demonstrate the superiority of their products but to promote recreational shooting in general.

Cartridge Company, traveled to Hyannis to see Hardy shoot. Peters was looking for more representatives to travel and demonstrate the superiority of their ammunition. Within a few days, a telegram arrived from Peters to report to Cincinnati immediately if Hardy was interested in the job.

Hardy had not been on the shooting exhibition circuit long before it became evident he had a knack for pleasing a crowd. One of his most popular demonstrations was shooting an outline of an Indian chief on a sheet of tin so quickly it seemed impossible. Hardy

added “Captain” to his name for promotional purposes, a title that would be made official in 1916 when he was commissioned by the Ordinance Department of the Colorado National Guard. Hardy was no longer playing the fiddle to earn ammunition for practicing – Peters Cartridge Company supplied him with all he could shoot.

On the Road

The early years of the 1900s were a time when both arms and ammunition manufacturers recognized the financial

advantage of not only advertising and promoting their products, but also promoting sport shooting in general as a wholesome activity. The more people shooting, the more ammunition sold, and Peters would have its share of the market. Hardy moved to Lincoln in 1904 so it was convenient to travel by rail to destinations in all directions. While Hardy’s shooting interests were largely restricted to rifles and revolvers, he was also an accomplished shotgun shooter. In 1906, Hardy took a Lincoln trapshooting team to the American Handicap at the Chicago Gun Club, where they broke the world record by dusting 494 of 500 blue rocks. During his residence in Lincoln, Hardy was a regular performer at the Nebraska State Fair.

A common feat of exhibition shooters, or “trick shooters” as they were more commonly called, such as Buffalo Bill was to gallop through the arena breaking glass balls thrown in the air. These marksmen were using rifles but most were firing cartridges loaded with shot, not bullets. Hardy refused to trick his audiences and when he shot objects thrown in the air his rifle was loaded with bullets.

Hardy seemed determined to set all records for shooting air-borne small objects with a rifle, usually shooting Peters’ .22-caliber “shorts.” Hardy shot 5,152 2½-inch wooden balls out of the air before missing at the Nebraska State Fair in 1905. In 1907, he hit all but six of 1,000 apples thrown in the air. That same year he hit 992 of 1,000 marbles tossed in the air. And, Hardy could accomplish such shooting feats in record times. On one occasion he broke 500 balls in a little over 11 minutes. Peters Cartridge Company, was delighted and frequently used Hardy to advertise their ammunition in sporting publications.

Hardy disliked being called a “trick shooter” and in an October 1939 *Outdoor Life* article was quoted to say: “Expert fancy shooting is what it should be called, not trick shooting. Trick means to deceive, and there is certainly nothing deceptive about fancy shooting. Anyone with normal faculties can learn to shoot well, if he has perseverance and coordination.”

In 1912, the Peters Cartridge Company moved Hardy to Denver to

serve as their representative for Colorado, New Mexico and southern Wyoming. When William F. “Buffalo Bill” Cody died in 1917, he was living with a sister in Denver, having lost most of his once substantial fortune on poor investments. Hardy was one of Cody’s pallbearers. In 1926, Hardy was transferred to the Pacific Coast, where he coached men of the Los Angeles police department, and in 1927 the Hardys purchased a home in Beverly Hills; a two-story, Spanish style house with a 65-foot long underground shooting gallery where Hardy could practice. The Hardys’ days of moving were over.

A.H. Hardy retired from exhibition shooting in 1938, four years after the Remington Arms Company bought the Peters Cartridge Company. Through all the years Hardy was traveling for exhibition shoots, he always kept a full leatherworking shop wherever he lived. After retiring from the shooting circuit, he devoted most of his time to making saddles and other equestrian leatherwork,

gun cases and holsters – about anything that could be made from cow hide. Hardy’s meticulous work and his intricate and exquisite tooling made any piece of leatherwork that had passed through his hands highly desirable at the time, and even more so today.

Hollywood Cowboys

Because he lived in Beverly Hills and because of his reputation with firearms, it was not surprising that Hardy was soon in demand in the motion picture industry as a “technical director” for shooting sequences. When the 1935 movie *Annie Oakley* was filmed (a romanticized biography of the lady sharpshooter), Hardy’s

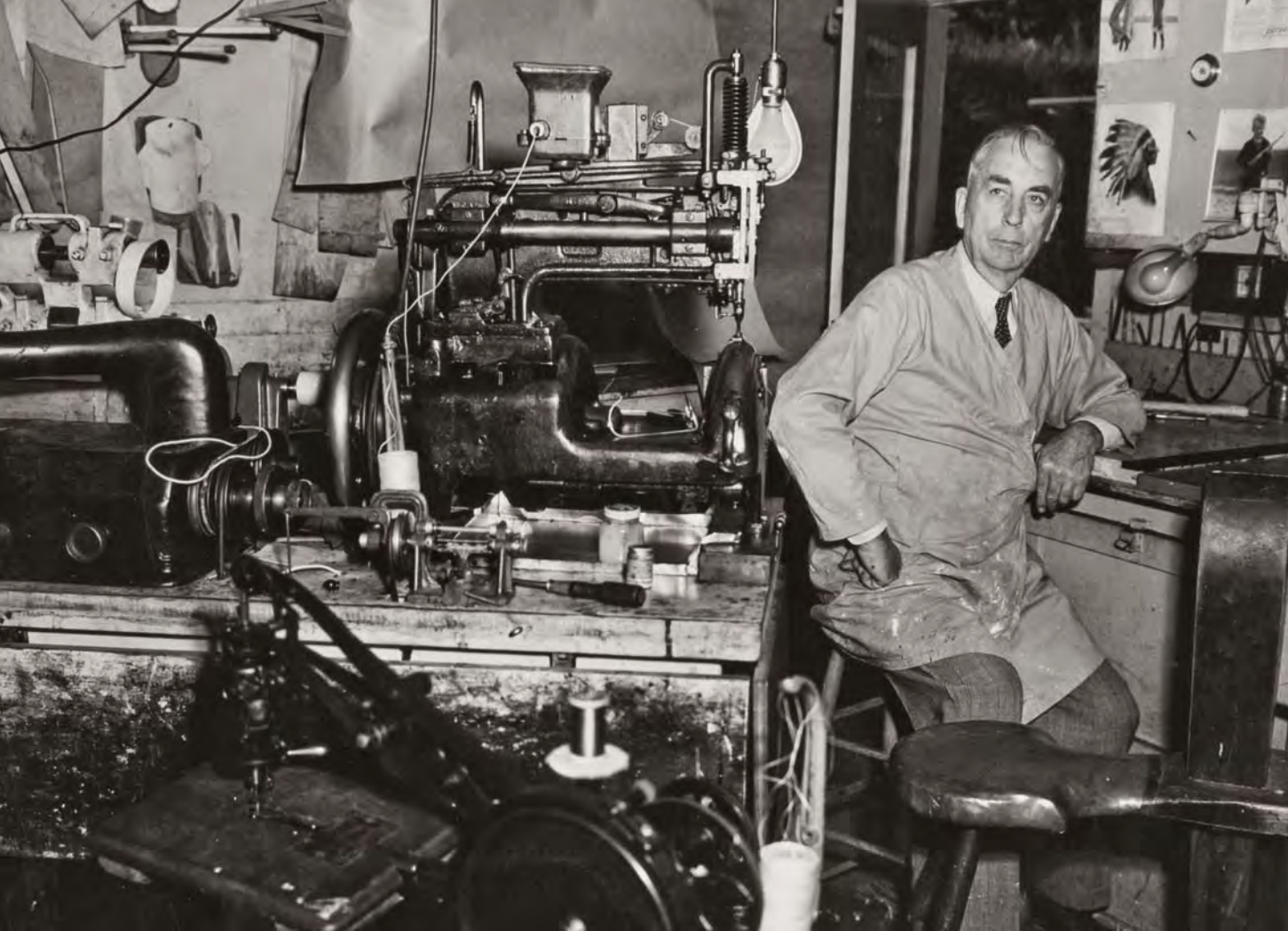
youngest daughter, Kathryn, did the shooting for Barbara Stanwyck, who played Annie, and Hardy for Preston Foster, who played Toby Walker. Hardy taught many cowboy actors how to



Hardy not only made saddles, gun cases and holsters, but almost anything that could be made from cow hide, including purses.



One of Hardy’s most popular demonstrations was shooting an outline of an Indian on a sheet of tin with a .22 caliber rifle.



Once retired from exhibition shooting, Hardy devoted more of his time to leatherwork, particularly saddles and holsters for movie cowboys. His leatherwork was valuable then, and is highly sought by collectors today. This photo was taken in 1942.

shoot rifles and revolvers, and often made custom holsters for them. Many became lifelong friends. Perhaps the most famous cowboy actor Hardy worked with was Tom Mix, who made 336 films between 1910 and 1935, all but nine of which were silent films. Mix, dubbed “King of the Cowboys,” was the prototype for the dozens of cowboy actors who would follow him. Over the years Hardy tutored, in addition to Tom Mix, Fred Stone, Clark Gable, William S. Hart, Andy Devine, Fred MacMurray and others.

Shooting Feats

“Capt. A.H. Hardy, of Nebraska, has been before the public but a comparatively short time,” a January 21, 1905 article in *The Sportsman’s Review*, reported, but “his feats in rifle and revolver shooting are recognized as phenomenal. He is an athlete, as well as a crack shot with a rifle, pistol and revolver. At his exhibition at the Cincinnati Gun Club grounds last

Friday, he, with a rifle, cut cards held edgewise at a distance of perhaps thirty feet, and also duplicated this standing on his head.”

Hardy gave an exhibition at the National Matches at Camp Perry in September 1928. An article in the October 1928 issue of *American Rifleman* stated: “Captain Hardy opened his performance by shooting with his .38 Special revolver, at a silhouette man target at 300 yards. With the variable cross wind blowing it seemed incredible that any hits could be made at all at that range with only a revolver, held in one hand and having a velocity of but 860 foot-seconds at the muzzle. The odds were strongly against Captain Hardy, who stated that such shooting could be done only on an absolutely calm day. Yet the Captain went through with it, and actually scored four hits out of nine shots at this 300-yard range.”

“Captain Hardy then showed how two Blue Rock targets – one stationary, and one swinging – could be broken,

simultaneously, by using a revolver in each hand,” the article continued. “Many interesting stunts followed, such as hitting small-sized steel washers thrown into the air, both .22 and .32-20 caliber rifles being used, the latter with the new high speed ammunition. Hitting apples thrown in the air, shooting the .32-20; shattering quartered bricks in the air with the .30-30; hitting five Blue Rock targets thrown in the air simultaneously, a repeating shotgun being used for the purpose. One particularly difficult stunt Captain Hardy performed was to eject a .22 cartridge from a slide-action repeating rifle, and then hit this cartridge before it reached the ground.” Hardy also shot the end off a cigar held in the mouth of an assistant, split a playing card at about 15 yards, and shot a blue rock while facing the opposite direction with a revolver on top of his head and aiming with the aid of a mirror.

Hardy was always coming up with never-before-done shooting exhibits. The October 1939 issue of *Outdoor*

Life reported the following: “Hardy performed one of the greatest shotgun feats of all time at the dedication of an airport in Cincinnati, Ohio in 1923. A plane flying at eighty-five miles an hour, at an elevation of about 200 feet, drew behind it ten six-inch balloons on a long line. The shooter, leading the target by fifteen feet, shot at a balloon each time the plane passed, and he burst nine out of ten!”

The 1928 *American Rifleman* article reported guns used by Hardy for his exhibition shooting included: “...three handguns, two of which are 6-inch Colt Officer’s Models, the other being a Camp Perry Model ... In .22-caliber rifles Captain Hardy used a Model 90 Winchester slide-action, and the lever action Marlin. Then there is a .32-20 Marlin lever action and a 12-gauge hammerless Marlin Pump gun. Captain Hardy and Mr. Marlin were close personal friends.

“Shooters are not born;” Hardy wrote in the July 1927 issue of *The American Rifleman*, “they are developed by hard, intelligent practice. Naturally some become more proficient than others, just the same as in music you will find those who acquire the art much faster than others, which we call natural ability. Application, however, is the keynote to success.”

A.H. “Captain” Hardy passed away August 13, 1950, in Los Angeles after a brief illness.

Editor’s Note: Photographs for this article and much of the information were graciously made available by the Grant County Historical Society Museum. A special thank you to Ginger Fouse, curator. Grant County – Its Friends and Neighbors, originally published in 1980, was expanded and reprinted in 2003 and is available from the historical society in Hyannis.



Hardy’s Winan’s American Amateur Revolver Championship first place metal was one of dozens won by the sharpshooter.



Hardy and his family were living in Beverly Hills, California when he retired. He soon was teaching movie cowboys, like silent screen cowboy star Tom Mix, shown here with his wife in 1926, how to draw fast and shoot straight.

Crescent Lake

Finally Open for Fishing

By Eric Fowler

It's a long, winding and sometimes bumpy road to Crescent Lake, no matter where you're driving from – 20 to 30 miles of gravel or single-lane asphalt from Oshkosh to the south, or Antioch or Lakeside to the north. The metaphorical road to opening this deep, publicly owned Sandhills lake and its neighbor, Blue Lake, to public fishing was nearly as tortuous.

The effort, an idea spawned more than 20 years ago, was finally completed late last year when the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission obtained a lease on 87 acres to create Crescent Lake Wildlife Management Area, built an access road, parking lots and a boat ramp, and opened the lake to fishing. An easement with AgReserves, Inc., a land-management subsidiary of the Mormon church and owner of the land around both lakes, will now allow anglers access to Blue Lake.

Whether they prefer soft water or hard, anglers should find the journey down the long road to the lakes

worthwhile, for at the end road are yellow perch, bluegill, crappie and large and smallmouth bass. Hunters will appreciate the project, too, as they can now use the WMA as a base camp for hunts on the adjacent Crescent Lake National Wildlife Refuge (NWR), as well as waterfowl hunts on Crescent Lake. (Yes, it's confusing and no, we don't know why they named a refuge after a lake that is outside its boundaries, but that's another story.)

The creation of Crescent Lake WMA actually began in the late-1800s, when federal surveyors were crisscrossing the countryside marking section and township corners for the free land that would be provided to homesteaders. When surveyors came to a lake too large to run their equipment across, they meandered their survey line around it. Nineteen such meandered lakes exist in

Nebraska, including Crescent Lake, the second largest of our Sandhills lakes next to Dad's Lake on the Valentine NWR. As such, the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission has the authority to improve them for public use, but heretofore had not, primarily because while the lakes are public, the land around them is not.

The size and depth of Crescent

Lake (982 acres and 16-feet deep in spots) made the idea of gaining access worth pursuing. The fact that the state already owned a portion of the land around the lake, "school land" managed by the Board of Educational Land and Funds (BELF), helped make it a reality. Discussions between the Commission, BELF, and the Eldred family, the previous lease holder of the school section and owner of the surrounding ranchland, about purchasing or leasing all or part of the school land began in the 1990s. The deal was completed in 2010, with the Commission leasing enough to provide access from the county road to the lake. AgReserves, Inc., which purchased the Eldred Ranch, kept the lease on the rest and

also agreed to an easement allowing anglers access to Blue Lake via a 2.7-mile-long, two-track, 4-wheel-drive trail road.

While the lease for Crescent Lake WMA was signed in 2010, work to improve fishing began in 2007 when Commission biologists renovated seven lakes and the drainage ditches and wetlands connecting them on private and refuge land in the watershed above Crescent and Blue lakes in order to kill the common carp that dominated the waters. The renovation of Crescent and Blue in the fall of 2008 was followed with stocking of yellow perch and bluegill. In the summer of 2009, black crappies were added to both lakes, and Crescent Lake received largemouth

bass while smallmouth bass were stocked in Blue Lake.

Al Hanson, the Commission's fisheries manager in northwestern Nebraska who has been working on the Crescent Lake project since the late-1980s with former district manager Jack Peterson, has sampled the lakes with both nets and fishing pole.

"There's going to be some nice perch out there [this winter]," said Hanson. "I'm sure there are some 10 ½- to 11-inches."

However, Hanson said, there won't be a large number of that size class of fish, which are from the original stocking of 50,000 four-inch-long perch in Blue and 125,000 in Crescent. Anglers will find more of their progeny, as well as

plenty of 10- to 12-inch smallmouth and largemouth bass and a few 8- or 9-inch crappies.

Hanson said he wanted to try smallmouth bass in the Sandhills after seeing reports of them doing well in lakes of comparable size in South Dakota. "Smallies" are less productive than their big-mouthed cousins, which can sometimes take over a lake. "I wanted it to be taken up by perch, crappie and bluegill," said Hanson.

Only limited sampling has been conducted on the lakes since they were restocked, and Hanson is looking to get more reliable data when they are sampled in earnest next spring. For the most part, however, he suspects most of the fish need one more growing season



At 982 acres, Crescent Lake, foreground, is the largest of Nebraska's Sandhills lakes, including its neighbor to the west, Blue Lake, and Island Lake and others to the north on Crescent Lake National Wildlife Refuge. Crescent and Blue are now open to fishing.



Al Hanson, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission district fisheries manager, holds a pair of yellow perch caught at Blue Lake.

PHOTO BY BOB GRIER

PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER



PHOTO BY JON FARRAR

The removal of carp has improved water quality and increased aquatic vegetation, providing more food and cover for ducks such as blue-winged teal.

before enough have reached keeper-size proportions to make a trip to the lake worthwhile.

It will take several more years for another benefit of the project to take hold: the reemergence of aquatic vegetation in all of the lakes where carp had stirred the bottom and clouded the water, either hindering or preventing aquatic plant growth that is a vital link in the aquatic food web needed to support a quality fishery.

Crescent, Hanson said, was almost

entirely devoid of emergent vegetation. “That thing has been a wind-swept mud hole since carp came in here,” he said. “I don’t know how long carp have been there, but I’d bet it’s been 80 years at least.” Recovery will be slow, but already Hanson is seeing bulrushes spring up where there had been none, as well as a few cattails.

While vegetation is the cornerstone of a good fishery in the Sandhills, alkalinity of the water is another factor that will affect both fish and vegetation.

While Crescent, Blue and seven of the lakes above them are connected, their alkalinity varies greatly. Both Crescent and Blue are more alkaline than, for example, the Sandhills lakes on the Valentine NWR, and as such can have a somewhat different invertebrate forage base. Hanson said that while he rarely sees cattails on an alkaline lake, sedges and hard-stemmed bulrushes do fine. Fish production can be higher on lakes with mid-range alkalinity, especially perch, likely due to the types of invertebrates the water and aquatic vegetation support.

Increased aquatic vegetation will also benefit waterbirds, providing both food and cover for both nesting and migrating ducks, geese, shorebirds and wading birds. Surveys on Island Lake, a popular fishery on the refuge, showed a tenfold increase in breeding pairs of ducks using the lake and a forty-fold increase in overall duck use following a 1978 renovation to remove carp.

Vegetation won’t dominate either Crescent or Blue lake, as it does some Sandhills lakes, because their depth, 16 and 20 foot maximum and mean depth 8 and 10 feet, respectively, easily double the typical depths found on other Sandhills waters. That depth, Hanson said, will help stave off winterkill, which can sometimes affect shallower lakes.

The nature of the groundwater-fed Crescent Lake, as well as its depth, combined to create the only bad news in the project to date: some carp survived the renovation efforts. Notoriously difficult to eliminate from this type of lake, Hanson suspects the carp found refuge in the springs seeping from the deep trench that spans the lake from north to south. “That’s

what happens when you have good water flow seeping in from good groundwater,” he said. “It’s just real tough to get it targeted.” With high water in 2010, a few of those carp have found their way into Blue Lake, as did largemouth bass.

If those carp gain a foothold, as they almost always do, vegetation and game fish will begin to decline and the lakes may have to be renovated again. But that may not be for 10 years or more, so don’t let the carp deter you from fishing. In the meantime, Crescent and Blue lakes will be as productive as any other newly renovated Sandhills lake in western Nebraska, said Hanson. That should mean excellent fishing ... if you’re willing to follow the long, winding and sometimes bumpy road. ■



PHOTO BY BOB GRIER

In 2008, rotenone was used to kill carp in Crescent and Blue lakes, a key step in the fishery restoration in both lakes.

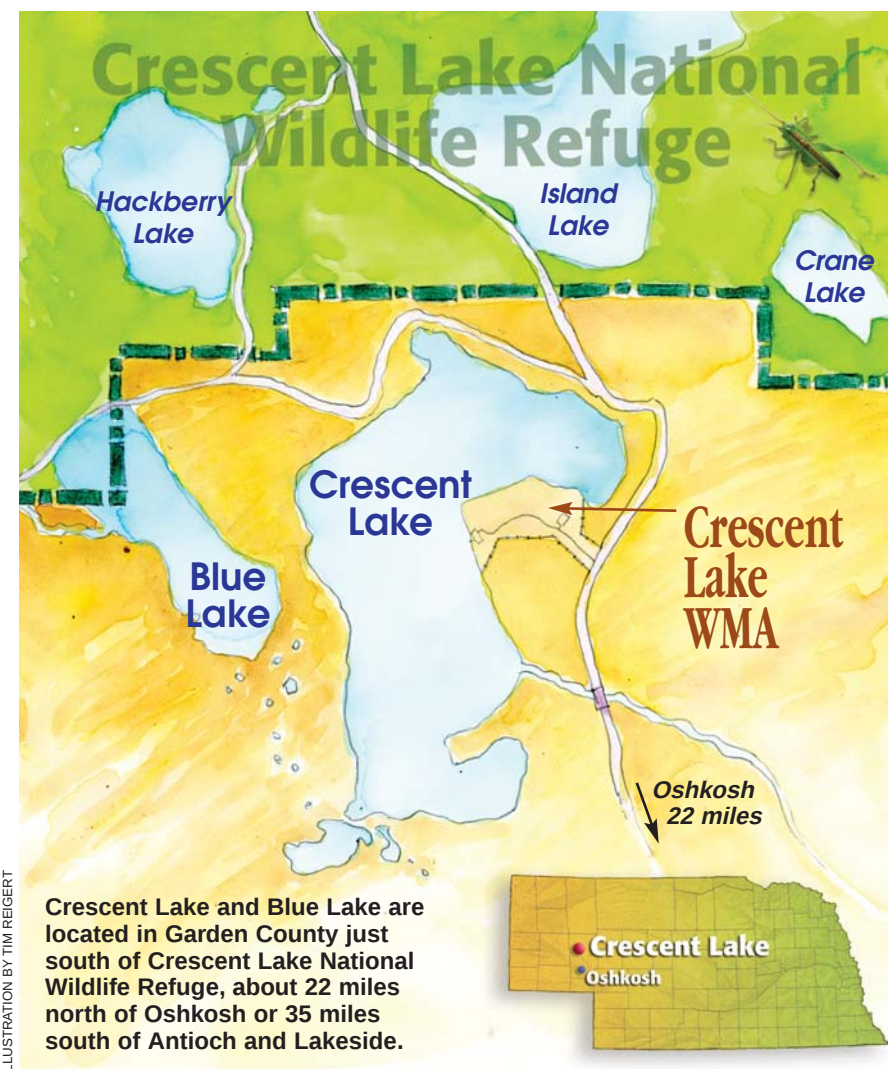


ILLUSTRATION BY TIM REIGERT

Crescent Lake and Blue Lake are located in Garden County just south of Crescent Lake National Wildlife Refuge, about 22 miles north of Oshkosh or 35 miles south of Antioch and Lakeside.

What’s There

Fishing

Crescent Lake: 982 acres, largemouth bass, yellow perch, bluegill, black crappie. Concrete ADA boat ramp, parking lot and camping area on 87 acres. Access via county road. 5 mph (no wake). No ATVs on ice.

Blue Lake: 311 acres, small- and largemouth bass, yellow perch, bluegill, black crappie. Access across private land via 2.7 mile-long, two-track, 4-wheel-drive trail road. Close gates behind you. Small boats are recommended as there is no improved ramp. 5 mph (no wake). Lake open to fishing only and only during daylight hours. Area is closed to all access during the nine-day November firearm deer season. No ATVs allowed.

Crescent Lake National Wildlife Refuge - Island Lake: (711 acres, bluegill, crappie, largemouth bass, yellow perch) is open year-round. **Smith Lake** (225 acres, bluegill, crappie, largemouth bass, yellow perch) and **Crane Lake** (128 acres, yellow perch) are open to fishing from Nov. 1 to Feb. 15 only, with no boats allowed. The refuge is open during daylight hours only. No live baitfish allowed.

Hunting

Upland hunting opportunities are very limited on Crescent Lake WMA, but waterfowl hunting is allowed from the water anywhere on the lake.

Most of the adjacent Crescent Lake National Wildlife Refuge is open to prairie grouse, pheasant, rabbit, coyote, furbearer and deer hunting, and a portion is open to waterfowl hunting. Nontoxic shot is required for all shotgun hunting on both the NWR and WMA.

Camping

A parking lot in the uplands above the lake is designated for primitive camping on Crescent Lake WMA. A pit toilet is located adjacent to this lot. No open fires are allowed. No trash pickup is provided (there are better things to spend your permit dollars on), so pack out what you pack in.

No camping is allowed on Crescent Lake NWR.

For more information on the Crescent Lake NWR, go to www.fws.gov/crescentlake.

Wildlife Conservation Funding

Linking restoration, research and education.

By Lindsay Rogers, Wildlife Education, Nebraska Game & Parks Commission

Conservation is akin to a three-legged chair. One leg is the research necessary to understand the needs of wildlife species. Another is using that understanding to take actions necessary to benefit wildlife, such as managing their habitats. The last leg is education, passing knowledge along so that others can make informed conservation decisions. Each leg is equally important; without one the others fail.

The Nebraska Wildlife Conservation Fund (WCF) exemplifies this metaphor. The Fund, which the Nebraska Legislature created to benefit the hundreds of species that are not hunted or fished, provides much needed financial support for conservation research, actions and education. It receives no tax funding, instead solely relying on donations made by thousands of conservation-minded Nebraskans across the state.

The benefits of research and conservation projects supported by the WCF are often easy to see. For example, when scientists recently placed WCF-funded satellite transmitters on two Sandhills-nesting long-billed curlews, their subsequent movements painted a fascinating real-time picture of how these birds made their way to and from wintering grounds in northern Mexico. Studying the migration patterns of birds allows researchers to know the specific habitats and resting spots the birds are using. This, in turn, allows conservation actions to target these areas.

Similarly, anyone walking a pasture who has come upon a steel livestock watering tank and seen an unfortunate bird bobbing on the surface can understand the benefit of WCF-funded “tank ladders” – small metal ramps placed inside the tank that help small animals escape after an unexpected dunking.

The benefits of conservation education are

sometimes more difficult to discern because they often play out over many years, long after a

class exercise or workshop is over. However, few doubt the power of education to help people make solid decisions, and the WCF is actively invested in supporting the “third leg” of the chair. It is through education that we help Nebraska’s citizens – adults and children – understand why nongame species need protection, why we need to learn more about them, and what benefits they provide to all of us.

The range of education projects funded by the WCF is impressive: plant identification workshops with local land-owners, wildlife track guide and matching cards, an interactive bird web site, peregrine falcon nest cam, and on-the-ground environmental education positions, to name a few.

Plant Identification Workshops

These workshops help landowners get to know the native (and invasive) plants on their land. Although most landowners in Nebraska thoroughly know their land, these workshops help landowners identify native plants and provide information about their function in the prairie ecosystem. Landowner workshops also help teach participants about conservation practices that are available and ways to conserve native plants that still provide economic benefit.

Track Id Guide and Matching Cards

Workshops are great for landowners and teachers, but for young students education looks entirely different. For these students, environmental education might entail dissecting owl pellets, building a bird feeder, or looking for animal tracks in the snow. Last year, the WCF helped create a guide to the tracks of Nebraska animals. This simple guide contains bright, full-color images of 22 different Nebraska animals, as well as information about each animal and crisp drawings of their tracks.

Accompanying this guide is a set of matching cards. Using the identification guide, students are asked to match the image of the animal with the animal’s front and hind tracks.

Looking for animal tracks is a simple way to get outside and explore. Providing Nebraska’s teachers and students with guides and Nebraska-specific resources affords them the knowledge and encouragement they need to get actively engaged in nature. Once outside, students will begin to look, explore and wonder about the nature around them. This, in turn, leads to students developing a deeper understanding of the ecosystem around them.

Project BEAK

Project BEAK (Bird Education and Awareness for Kids) started as a small endeavor to create Nebraska-specific educational resources about birds for middle-school students. With the help of several grants – including one from the Wildlife Conservation Fund – Project BEAK quickly developed into an incredible web site (www.projectbeak.org)

dedicated to educating students of all ages about Nebraska’s birds. The web site contains scientifically accurate information about bird conservation, bird adaptations, Nebraska’s unique bird biodiversity and Nebraska’s threatened and endangered birds, plus video clips, interactive games, quizzes, diagrams and bird-related resources and links. In addition, there are a series of classroom activities to help teachers incorporate birds and birding into their curriculums while meeting state education standards.

The goal of Project BEAK is to teach students about the amazing habitats, ecosystems and bird species found here in Nebraska – their backyard. They do not need to travel great distances to see exciting species, intricate courtship dances, or remarkable bird adaptations. It’s all right here in

Nebraska. Project BEAK seeks to get kids interested in birds, and then encourage them to go outside to see these incredible Nebraska species for themselves.

The web site is geared to students in grades 5-8; however, anyone can glean

information from the units, whether it’s a teacher looking for background information, a beginning birder, or an expert birder looking for a fun activity.

Peregrine Falcon Nest Cam

Watching a peregrine falcon chick hatch out of its egg is an amazing sight, but because peregrines nest on top of soaring building and towering cliffs, it is not something easily seen. Beginning in 1990, peregrines were seen around the State Capitol building in Lincoln. To encourage nesting on the capitol tower, a nest box was added in 1991 with WCF support. Nest boxes are great at encouraging falcons to nest, but they don’t allow people to see the eggs, chicks and eventual fledging. In 2005, a WCF-funded camera was placed on a new nest box. Since then, citizens from across the state (and the world) have witnessed 16 chicks fledge from atop the capitol tower.

These nest cams are important because they are a simple, effective way of engaging Nebraska citizens in conservation actions. Anyone can log on to the nest cam (OutdoorNebraska.ne.gov/wildlife/webcam/peregrine) and see what is happening in the nest box during the nesting season, and everyone is invited to participate in the “Name the Chick” contest sponsored by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission.



Environmental educator Jamie Bachmann of Norfolk helps a visually-impaired student feel a coyote pelt.

Environmental Educators

When it comes to environmental education, workshops, guides and web sites are great; but what often makes the biggest impact in a local area is on-the-ground environmental educators. These educators provide skills and enthusiasm for conservation and environmental education that a web site cannot.

The Wildlife Conservation Fund recently devoted funds to create two environmental education partnerships in Nebraska. These partnerships – one with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the other with the National Wild Turkey Federation – created two educator positions in Nebraska. These educators will be local contacts in the Grand Island and Norfolk areas for teachers and resource professionals wanting to engage their students in environmental education. Whether they are presenting to a classroom of preschoolers, leading an educator workshop, or simply helping direct a teacher to the best local field trip site, one thing is sure – without WCF support, these education positions would not be possible.

Why Environmental Education?

As an environmental educator, people often ask me why we need environmental education. Explaining that it is the third leg on the chair often does not satisfy them. The true reasons we need environmental education are simple and vast: Environmental education leads to knowledgeable citizens, it leads to students who have an appreciation of their local community and environment, it leads to citizens who understand the need for research on long-billed curlews. Most importantly, environmental education leads to citizens who are willing to conserve our natural resources. Environmental education leads to action. •

Donations to the Wildlife Conservation Fund can be made online at NebraskaWildlifeFund.org or by a check made out to the Fund and sent to the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, P.O. Box 30370, Lincoln, NE 68503-0370. Donations can also be made by using the nongame check-off box found on state income tax forms. All contributions to the Wildlife Conservation Fund are tax deductible.



BOOKS/PUBLICATIONS/VIDEOS

NEBRASKA WILDFLOWERS. It's baaack ... ! Out of print for 21 years, the second edition of *NEBRASKAland* senior editor Jon Farrar's *Field Guide to Wildflowers of Nebraska and the Great Plains* is now available. This 6 by 9½-inch paperback is a must have for anyone interested in learning more about Nebraska's wildflowers. To order, visit NebraskalandGifts.com or call (800) 742-0056.

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▲ Fishing the outlet at Johnson Lake in 1947. Left to right are: Darrell Martin, Cliff "Slim" Martin, and myself, Bob Martin. There was a pump house we used to clean fish at.
— Bob Martin, Lincoln, Nebraska



▲ These photos were taken at Lincoln County's Lake Maloney during the summer of 1977. The fisherman is the late John Norrell of North Platte. What I remember most about this photo is how his dog went on point everytime he hooked a fish. The camera used to take these photos was a Leica M-3.
— Francis McWilliams, Sierra Vista, Arizona



▲ This picture was taken on Post Office Hill in Peru, Nebraska in the mid-1960s. Pictured left to right are: myself, Gary Adams; my dad, Virgil Adams; Hank Baker; and my brother, Steve Adams.

Our dad hunted and fished around Peru all of his life and the lessons he taught us about the outdoors we have used to this day. I think pheasant and quail hunting were his favorites. A Korean War vet, great father and grandpa – he passed away in 1998.

— Gary Adams, Auburn, Nebraska



▲ These three young fellas went trout fishing on the Niobrara River in Sioux County in 1972 with snow on the ground.

From left to right are: Steve Morava, Mike Kresl and Greg Morava. All are from Hemingford.

— Alvin Kresl, Hemingford, Nebraska

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. Photos will be returned.

Hunting for Hunters

Perhaps attending the masquerade is not so uncommon as one may think.

By Roger Welsch

About this time of year I used to get to feeling mighty lonely and left out. You see, I'm not a hunter, but I have a lot of buddies who are. So I'd go uptown for the mail and there would be all my friends, standing around outside Schroeder's Bakery, the fire hall or the American Legion where big hunters' breakfasts were being shoveled up ... pancakes, eggs, coffee, pastries, bacon, ham, sausage, fried potatoes ... the works. Or they'd be leaning up against pickup trucks full of dogs, comparing guns, belching, smelling bad, chewing on homemade jerky, talking loud and obnoxious, wearing all kinds of neat, shabby outdoor clothes, kind of worn and comfortable stuff, unshaven, muddied, scruffy, getting ready to climb trees, hide in bushes, drive randomly around the countryside, cuss, shoot, complain, lie.... And there was me, in clean overalls and smelling good, relatively, going home to sit here and look out the window at the outdoors. No one would even talk with me because I just didn't fit in. And it was obvious. They were having fun. And I wasn't.

And then they all took off to ricochet around Nebraska for a couple days, waste time, eat huge, greasy meals at various taverns in other towns, flirt with waitresses, sit around campfires with the dogs, eat without washing their hands and come home late, still smelling bad. And no one (nudge nudge, wink wink) could give them a bad time about it because, well ... they were only out there working "to put meat on the family table."

Then I got smart and figured out that I don't really have to hunt to do all those things. I just need to get the right kind of brown coveralls, heavy boots, some scruffy dogs and a pickup truck, and stand around like all my friends. I didn't even need a gun. Just an appetite for pancakes, bacon, ham, sausage, fried potatoes, gooey pastries, eggs... A couple days of personal neglect pretty much took care of the requisite smell and the loud hoohaing comes natural to me as a male. I don't think my friends even noticed that when we all yelled our wishes for a good hunt at each other and took off down main street that I didn't go anywhere other than usual. I just pulled into my driveway, took the mail into the house and settled down for a nap to sleep all that good food off. Later I could drive around wearing a hunter orange vest, wave at other hunters, maybe stop and ask them how it was going, even stroll into a village tavern and join a bunch of other stalwarts, walk around in the woods, and then go home



tired and smelling bad. Just like my friends.

That was working fine for me and I was beginning to congratulate myself for being so smart when it occurred to me that, hey, I wasn't seeing any pheasants or deer carried out of those fields or in the back of those pickup trucks! Wait a minute! How many of these guys are doing the same thing I am?! What percentage of frauds are out there masquerading as hunters but only indulging in the easy parts? You know...like me!

So I sure hope I'm not giving anything away here, but I'm thinking maybe 75 to 85 percent of the "hunters" you see out there in Nebraska fields, forests and villages aren't hunters at all, but frauds like me who just want to be in on the good times, wear comfortable old clothes, keep company with good dogs and eat big breakfasts. But of course I can't be sure. What's your opinion? And while we analyze this situation, why don't you pass the sausage and pancakes – and oh yeah, the butter and maple syrup... Let's chow down, then go out in the street, lean on our pickups and talk about it. ■

Roger Welsch is an author, humorist and folklorist. For years he was a regular guest on CBS's Sunday Morning with Charles Kuralt. Welsch resides in Dannebrog, Nebraska, with his wife, Linda. He has appeared in NEBRASKALAND Magazine since 1977.



ILLUSTRATION BY TIM REIGERT



The pictures you go out to make are often not the ones you come home with when you work as a wildlife photographer. It was late January, and deep cold following a blizzard had settled into the Platte Valley. I had spent the day in a grassy blind trying to photograph wintering mallards in a warmwater slough, but regular flyovers by a parade of raptors had kept the ducks scattered and on the opposite side of the river. Chilled to the bone, I wandered back to the truck in late afternoon, following an old trail road that divided a weedy field border and a woodland edge. In a drift of snow the shape of a crescent moon, I found a small cluster of quail tracks and followed. The tracks led me here to the middle of this weedy field, where the bobwhites now rested peacefully as frozen statues backlit by the weak winter sun. Nature all at once can be cruel and fragile, yet even in death there is a dignified beauty which will spring new life.

Michael Forsberg
January 26, 2010



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