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Cover: A hot air balloon lifts from the Mitchell Airfield at the Old West Balloon Fest in Scotts Bluff County.
JUSTIN HAAG

This page: Swimmers enjoy the beach at Lake Minatare State Recreation Area.
JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKALAND

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Nebraskaland
magazine

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PATHWAY FOR WILDLIFE

CREATING HIGH-QUALITY HABITAT THROUGHOUT NEBRASKA



Program Overview

Pathway For Wildlife (PFW) offers incentives to enhance wildlife habitat on cropland, working lands, and within local communities. Participants will apply specific wildlife and pollinator conservation practices to benefit pheasants, quail, grassland songbirds, monarch butterflies, native bees, and other wildlife. Additionally, the program aims to reduce soil losses, encourage soil health and improve water quality.



PATHWAY FOR GRASSLANDS

Plant native grasses and wildflowers to transition cropland or degraded grassland areas to working lands better suited for landowner objectives. Incorporate grassland management practices including brush management, prescribed fire, shrub thicket establishment, and chemical control.

Eligible Land

Land must be suitable for one of three program areas and its objectives. Cropland, grassland, community, business, and residential sites are eligible. Interested participants must ensure that existing federal, state, and local programs are utilized prior or in addition to the Pathway program. USDA-contracted acres (e.g. CRP) may be eligible PFW grassland practices. Cropland must be located in the Rainwater Basin area to be eligible for the Precision Ag Conservation project area.

Contract Length

1, 2, or 3-year contracts are available.



PATHWAY FOR PRECISION AG CONSERVATION

Plant a diverse cover crop mixture as part of a cropping rotation with benefits of soil health, weed competition, grazing utilization, wildlife and pollinator habitat providing awareness and an economic incentive to farmers considering alternatives. Limited to Rainwater Basin.

Payments

Pheasants Forever provides program participants with cost-share assistance for seed mixtures and establishment. Grassland projects may receive cost-share assistance for additional practices such as brush management, prescribed burning, and shrub thicket establishment. Additionally, Pheasants Forever provides annual payments to grassland seeding establishment contracts over 2 acres, unless the land is already enrolled in a USDA program. Annual payments are based on location (West \$30/acre; Central \$45/acre; East \$60/acre). Participants may forgo annual payment.

Program Highlights

- 1 to 3-year contract options
- 75-100% cost-sharing
- No cropping-history necessary
- Incentive payments
- Annual payment option



PATHWAY FOR COMMUNITY HABITAT

Plant native wildflowers, including milkweed for monarchs, in backyard habitats and urban green spaces to provide wildflowers blooming from April to October. Eligible project sites include city parks, colleges, libraries, churches, and other frequently visited areas.

Monitoring and Evaluation

To increase awareness and increased personal investment, participants will monitor project areas. Pheasants Forever will evaluate seeding success rate, management needs, and wildlife use. UNL may conduct research on cover crop sites.

Enrollment and More Information

Please complete and return a Notice of Interest form if you wish to join us in creating a pathway for wildlife. Pheasants Forever staff administers PFW and provides technical assistance. For more information about Pheasants Forever and its programs, visit NebraskaPF.com or contact your local Farm Bill Wildlife Biologist.



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Kirill Belashchenko, Lincoln
Red-headed Woodpecker

Jeffrey J. Hill, Omaha
Wildlife Safari Bull Elk



Chuck Hackenmiller, Lincoln
A Pawnee Lake Swim

Corrections: On page 93 of the April issue, the fish labeled river shiner is a brassy minnow. Also, the fish labeled Johnny darter is an Iowa darter.

On page 113 of the April issue, Rock Creek Station State Recreation Area should read Rock Creek Lake State Recreation Area.

On page 6 of the May issue, the top caption should read Lake Ogallala at Sunrise.

We regret the errors.

Send your comments and photos to:

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



TOADSTOOL PARK

A popular destination on the way to the Black Hills of South Dakota, Toadstool Geologic Park is located in the far northwestern corner of Nebraska in Sioux County.

JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKALAND



JON FARRAR, NEBRASKALAND

THREATENED AND ENDANGERED: THE TIMBER RATTLESNAKE

By Melissa Panella

The timber rattlesnake is sometimes called the American timber rattler, because it lives wild in no other country and symbolizes American pride, strength and vigilance. The timber rattlesnake is the largest of four pit viper species in Nebraska. Within the state’s borders, timber rattlesnakes are only found in the southeastern-most reaches, such as the Indian Cave and Rulo bluffs.

You can get a pretty good idea about where to find timber rattlesnakes based on their common name. Timber rattlesnakes indeed use timbered landscapes, for instance woodlands along rivers and upland woodlots. But, they also rely on grassland areas to hunt prey and to disperse into new locations. Prairie openings and crop fields near woodlands serve them quite well. However, they can run into trouble when they have to cross roads, busy trails, or find themselves in a field actively being cut for hay. The cover and safety of rock outcrops can provide a place for timber rattlesnakes to den during harsh weather that grips Nebraska during the cold winter months.

The distribution of timber rattlesnakes is shrinking everywhere they occur. Habitat has been lost or degraded, and in many parts of the country, rattlesnakes have been unnecessarily killed. While Nebraska’s timber rattlesnake population represents only a small proportion of the population as a whole, the state’s location within the species’ distribution is important in terms of the species’

biogeography, global genetic diversity and conservation value. These are several of the reasons why the timber rattlesnake was added to Nebraska’s threatened species list earlier this year.

To conserve timber rattlesnakes, it is crucial to protect their denning sites in the state since they are few and far between. Dens also need to get plenty of sunlight exposure to stay warm enough for this “cold-blooded” animal, so it may be necessary to cut back or otherwise limit weedy trees, shrubs, and invasive plants that grow near rattlesnake dens and cause too much shade. It is unlikely that timber rattlesnakes will ever have the opportunity to extend their range very far into the state of Nebraska, but we can do our best to provide suitable habitat to maintain and improve the unique populations currently here.

Because timber rattlesnakes are rare here, chances are you won’t come across one unless you intentionally seek them out. Timber rattlesnakes prefer to avoid people and usually remain motionless when encountered, striking only as a last defense. Under most circumstances, they don’t present much of a danger. One of the best things to do is just choose to stay back if you happen upon one and consider yourself lucky to witness this amazing animal in the wild.

Melissa J. Panella is a wildlife biologist for the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission.

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Virga over the Missouri River at Niobrara State Park. BROOKE TALBOTT, PLATTE BASIN TIMELAPSE

THE RAIN THAT NEVER HAPPENED

By Martha Shulski

You may have noticed optically thin features that streak downward from the base of clouds and curve or hook to nearly horizontal. What you are witnessing is water that fails to reach the ground. Sometimes raindrops or ice crystals that exit a cloud submit to the sky and evaporate or sublimate. This is called virga.

This phenomenon is more common in the arid climate of western Nebraska than in the humid east. Dryness and warmth help to vaporize the precipitation. Most often they are seen from mid-level clouds or high-base cumuliform clouds.

As these droplets or crystals turn to vapor, they can sometimes lead to a strong but short-lived downdraft. Therefore, you may feel a rush of cool air

while in the vicinity of virga.

RADAR (radio detection and ranging) imagery can be fooled into thinking these droplets are precipitation and show a signature as such. Researchers have found that vaporizing precipitation is more than 30% in the world’s major deserts and accounts for half of falsely detected precipitation in these areas.

While virga percentages are not that high here in Nebraska, be on the lookout for the rain that never happened.

Martha D. Shulski, at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, is the director of the Nebraska State Climate Office.

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Radio transmitters have been implanted in 40 sauger (pictured) and 40 walleye to study their movement in the Missouri River and Lewis and Clark Lake in northern Nebraska. The tagged fish are sporting jaw tags. ERIC FOWLER, NEBRASKALAND

STUDY TRACKING WALLEYE AND SAUGER

By Eric Fowler

Fishing hasn't been the same in Lewis and Clark Lake since historic flooding in 2011. Fisheries biologists hope studies of the movement of walleye and sauger now underway in the reservoir and Missouri River between Fort Randall and Gavins Point dams will help them better understand why.

Researchers with South Dakota Game, Fish & Parks, the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln School of Natural Resources implanted radio transmitters in 40 walleye and 40 sauger in the reach this spring and will track their movement past 16 receivers for the next few years. Biologists used nets, electrofishing and hook and line to catch a sampling of fish from different reaches of the river, reservoir and the delta at its upper end.

Will Radigan, who is doing the field work as part of his graduate studies at SNR, said receivers spaced every 5 miles on alternating banks of the river and on both sides of the reservoir should pick up any fish that swims within a half mile. The first check of the data recorders in mid-May, about six weeks into the project, showed 60 percent of each species had already done so.

"The majority of both have moved less than 5 miles, with the exception of one sauger that moved 40 miles and one walleye that moved a little over 55 miles," Radigan said.

The latter was tagged below Fort Randall Dam and passed a receiver near Gavins Point Dam 24 days later. "My guess is that walleye is probably through the dam right now," he said.

One walleye did pass through Gavins, detected on receivers tracking pallid sturgeon in the river below. The movement of fish through the dam, something biologists call entrainment, is part of the challenge of managing the fishery in the reservoir, which is more like a wide spot in the river. In a related study, Radigan is measuring the number of larval fish passing through the dam.

The 2011 flood flushed many fish through the system, including emerald shiners, a primary forage base for the lake, and white bass. Jeff Schuckman, regional fisheries manager with Game and Parks, said those species haven't recovered, nor have walleye, despite stocking 87 million fry and 14 million fingerlings since 2014. The walleye catch rates in their fall gill net surveys on the reservoir remain well below pre-2011 levels, and angler success also has declined.

Schuckman hopes the studies will help provide answers. "We're going to find out where the fish are moving to and from, and where they're living, and maybe get a chance to figure out what's attracting them to certain areas and then take a more in-depth look," he said.

Each fish in the study also received a metal jaw tag stamped with a three-digit number, and anglers catching these fish are asked to call the conservation agency in their state to report the tag number. Radigan said in early June that one tagged sauger was harvested and two walleyes caught and released.

Take a Beginner Fishing, Win Prizes!



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with family and friends!



Trout grilled in foil with vegetables. OLEG DOROSHENKO, GETTY IMAGES

GRILLED FISH IN A BOAT

By Connor Graham

In a boat of tinfoil that is.

Years ago a friend invited me over for lunch at his place prefacing that we would be having largemouth bass caught by him in his farm pond.

He was grilling the fillets in tinfoil “boats” on his gas grill outside. Grilling fish can be difficult because it’s much more delicate than regular meats like beef or poultry. To make this easier, place each fillet in its own tinfoil boat — keeping the meat together and holding in the juices and seasonings.

Ingredients

- 1 fish fillets (for each individual tinfoil boat)
- 1 lemon or lime
- 1 tablespoon butter
- Coarse sea salt
- Fresh ground black pepper
- Whatever other seasonings you prefer with fish

1. Dry the fillets with a paper towels to remove any water on the outside. This will help the fish to brown.
2. Tear sheets of aluminum foil large enough to

encompass the fillet and be able to roll the top and side edges up tight. Make sure the fillet is resting on the dull side of the foil – shiny on the outside, toward heat source.

3. Place one fillet in the center of each sheet of foil with butter. If the fish has skin on one side, that side should be facing down.

4. Add butter, squeeze a quarter of a lemon or half of a lime over the fillet. Lightly sprinkle with salt and pepper. Then add any herbs or spices that you would like, such as garlic, rosemary, paprika or dill. You can also toss in vegetables like onions, bell pepper and carrots.

5. Bend the foil over the fish and fold each edge so that it becomes a pouch. Use a fork to poke a few holes in the top to release steam as it cooks.

6. Place the foil packets on the grill. Grill over medium-high for 5 to 7 minutes (depending on the size of the fillet) on a gas or charcoal grill.

7. Remove the foil “boat” from the grill with either a long-handled metal spatula or long-handled grilling tongs. Enjoy!

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Dead Timber State Recreation Area

Complicated past, but a bright future

Story and photos by Jenny Nguyen-Wheatley

Despite its proximity to busy Highway 275 north of Scribner, Dead Timber State Recreation Area is hidden. Even its entrance, which faces a crop field on the other side, is unassuming and plain. The sign indicates that you're in the right place, but you turn off the county road and wonder, "Is this it?"

From your vehicle, you wouldn't be able to see that to the southwest, just beyond the stretch of mowed grass, past the pollinator garden — which grows tall and vibrant in summer — and down a gently curving path, you'd find an old, wooden bench. Step up closer and the ground gives way to a steep drop-off, opening up your field of view. Flooding has affected the SRA, clearly. But however overgrown and primitive, the verdant valley sprawls at your feet invitingly, the blue-green oxbow lake snaking among flood-afflicted terrain and timber below.

A beloved getaway for Dodge County locals, Dead Timber SRA was purchased by Game and Parks for \$7,000 in 1938.

Since then, the area has provided its dedicated visitors with decades of not only adventure and memories, but also peaceful seclusion.

Background

Dead Timber's 200 acres offers camping, fishing, hiking, picnicking and non-powered boating. Currently, key amenities include 17 electric campsites with 30-amp hookups; a 50-acre oxbow lake with bluegill, common carp, bullhead, channel and flathead catfish, crappie, freshwater drum and largemouth bass; and day-use shelters complete with tables, grills and spacious lawns for gatherings and games neatly tucked in the trees along the top of the bluffs.

Its landmark stone shelter — and likely the entrance pillars as well — was built in 1939 by the National Youth Association.

According to Scribner legend, the name "Dead Timber" comes from the Native Americans. Old-timers say that

Jerusalem artichoke sunflowers grow near an oxbow lake at Dead Timber State Recreation Area in Dodge County.



Shelly and Dave Dahl, of Scribner, prepare a fire while RV camping at Dead Timber.



Kevin Mannschreck, of Hooper, RV camps at Dead Timber State Recreation Area in Dodge County.

the Natives used the area as a seasonal camp, retreating behind the high bluffs near the Elkhorn River in winter and traveling down during the summer to camp near the oxbow lake. During one winter encampment, a fire got out of hand. It swept through the region, burning and killing much timber.

Despite the story behind Dead Timber's name, the SRA has been historically more wet than dry. Some of the SRA sits upon a bluff overlooking the oxbow lakes, but a significant amount of the area is located within the Elkhorn River floodplain; in 21 of

the past 80 years, the Elkhorn River has exceeded flood stage.

Flooding

Those who know and use Dead Timber love it, but addressing infrastructure issues has been an ongoing frustration for both locals and Game and Parks staff. Constant bouts of high water trap the land in a state of constant flux, adding to the piling costs of repairing recurring damages.

For example, changes in the landscape could be seen by examining

Google Earth images, showing how flooding was affecting the suspension bridge since the early 2000s, and how it got progressively worse. Built around 1939-1940, the bridge is a special place where countless visitors and their families have made memories. Sadly, the bridge is currently impassable.

Other amenities once located within the park's low-lying areas, including a campground and the through-road between the river and oxbow lake, were removed in the late 1990s and early 2000s due to flood damage.

The catastrophic flood event of 2019

resulted in the SRA's latest losses, washing out four of its primitive campsites and submerging the stone shelter house. Access to Dead Timber via Highway 275, which was heavily damaged by rushing water, was limited for months.

Despite years of degradation, dedicated visitors continue to make the most of their SRA. Visitors enthusiastically returned to Dead Timber when Highway 275 reopened in late summer 2019.

On a Saturday afternoon in late August of that year, campers, working

around mud and standing water, resumed their usual activity—a couple cooked dinner around a campfire by the oxbow lake, an extended family engaged in friendly competition over a game of cornhole, a gathering of friends cheered on their favorite teams in front of an outdoor TV at their RV. These people have camped at Dead Timber before, many times, and they will return again and again. Although the general feeling was of gladness around the campground — of relief that their SRA was still there and that they were able to get in some camping

before the end of summer — it was clear that improvements and changes were desperately wanting.

Redevelopment Plan

In response, Game and Parks is creating a plan to redevelop the flood-prone Dead Timber State Recreation Area. On March 23, 2021, Game and Parks offered a virtual public meeting via Zoom to open up comments and suggestions, which was attended by 170 people. The proposed redevelopment plan for Dead

Timber would showcase the SRA's natural features while addressing floodplain infrastructure, honoring the memories and traditions of area users, and providing new recreational opportunities. An online comment board also was offered through April 6. Feedback received at the Zoom

meeting and through the comment board will be beneficial in moving the redevelopment forward, said Michelle Stryker, Game and Parks' planning and programming division administrator. The plan will be finalized by summer 2021 and extend for the next five years. Dead Timber State Recreation



An assortment of wildflowers, including goldenrod, grow at Dead Timber.



Members of the Smolinski, Kennedy, Tauchman and Sorenson families from the Omaha area camp at Dead Timber.

Area is only one hour from Omaha. Whether you're looking for a weekend getaway for camping, or a peaceful place to recreate for the day with family and friends, Dead Timber might surprise you, even in its current state. When looking to the future, talks of a possible kayak launch, a new nostalgic pedestrian bridge, more miles of trails, better fishing access and a nature play area are all things for visitors, old and new, to get excited about. [N](https://outdoornebraska.org/deadtimber)

For the most updated information on Dead Timber, visit outdoornebraska.org/deadtimber.



The iconic shelter at Dead Timber still stands after the flood.



Located north of Scribner on Highway 275, Dead Timber is a 200-acre area with opportunities for camping, fishing and non-powered boating. The area offers peaceful seclusion for an afternoon or a weekend. A state park permit is required.

Outdoor Nebraska

By Renae Blum

Summer is in full swing, and despite the heat, there is plenty to enjoy about the Nebraska outdoors right now. Cool off at the beach, visit a new state park and grab your fishing pole! [N](#)



Enjoy the beach at a Nebraska state recreation area

Throughout the month | Statewide

Enjoy a summer's day by the beach at a Nebraska state recreation area. Most swimming beaches are located next to the day-use picnic locations, providing plenty to do throughout the day: friendly football and volleyball matches, fishing, barbecue, sunbathing and more. Find a park to visit at Outdoornebraska.org/swim. ERIC FOWLER, NEBRASKALAND



Attend "Blast From the Past" event

July 10 | Victoria Springs State Recreation Area

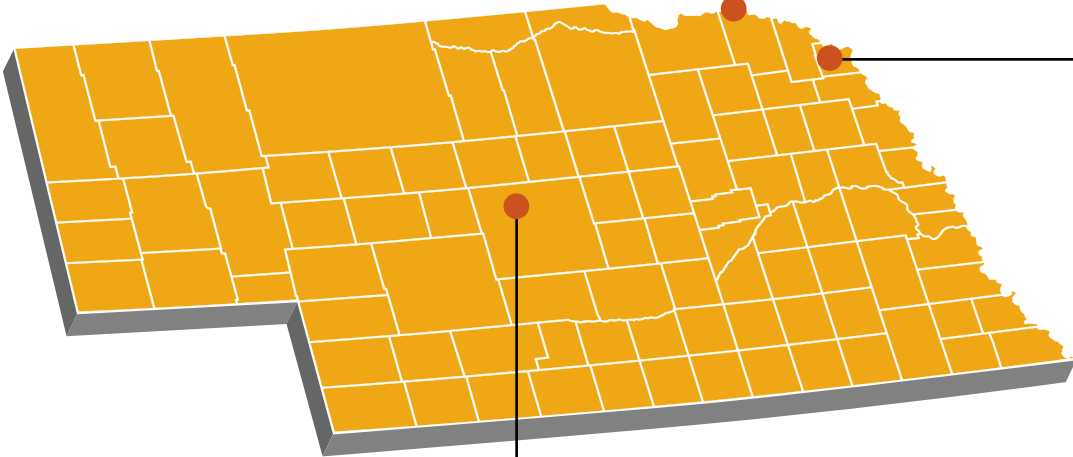
Celebrate the state park centennial at Nebraska's first state recreation area! Enjoy an 1800s vintage baseball game and old-fashioned kids' games, as well as a walking historical tour of the park. Other activities include fishing, Dutch-oven cooking demos, and live music and fireworks in the evening. ERIC FOWLER, NEBRASKALAND



Fish for walleyes at Lewis and Clark Lake

Throughout the month | Lewis and Clark State Recreation Area

In July, finding fish gets challenging anywhere in the state, but thanks to the flowing waters of Lewis and Clark Lake, fish like walleye are still biting as they search for food. This time of year, it's mostly a trolling bite, so a variety of crankbaits and live bait rigs work well. Focus on fishing shale banks, channel swings, flats — anywhere you can find schooling walleyes. JEFF KURRUS, NEBRASKALAND



Visit Danish Alps State Recreation Area

Throughout the month

Nebraska's newest state park area, Danish Alps State Recreation Area boasts great fishing and camping. Wet a line for largemouth bass, bluegill and walleye, stroll the paved trail encircling the lake, and go for a ride on a scenic equestrian trail. Don't forget to visit the selfie station for the Your Parks Adventure Challenge, with details at YourNebraskaParks100.org. JENNY NGUYEN-WHEATLEY, NEBRASKALAND

Practice for archery deer and turkey seasons

Throughout the month | Statewide

To be in strong shooting shape for archery deer and fall turkey season, start practicing now. Make it fun and go bowfishing, or participate in an outdoor 3-D shoot. It's also a good idea to practice shooting from an elevated stand or sitting position. Visit Outdoornebraska.org/shootingsportsfacilities for a list of archery ranges statewide. ERIC FOWLER, NEBRASKALAND



The Book of Names

By Renae Blum

Plain and unremarkable, the black binder usually sits on a small coffee table in Fort Atkinson State Historical Park's visitor center. But inside, it contains a remarkable picture of Fort Atkinson: Its pages list the names of everyone known to have lived at the fort, along with details about them that can reveal personalities, backgrounds and their futures.

Susan Juza, Fort Atkinson's long-time curator and a passionate lover of history, began the project as a relatively new employee at the fort, wondering exactly who had lived there. "If we were the largest military fort west of the Missouri River, what does that mean?" Juza said. "Did we have 300 people? Did we have a thousand people? We were guessing."

Now, more than 20 years later, she's gathered names and information for about 1,200 individuals, from generals to servants and slaves. Most entries include a person's name, rank and company, along with any personal information Juza could dig up, including age, height, eye and hair color, place of birth, former occupation, and details about their life at the fort.

As you read, interesting stories and people emerge. For example, Eliza Woolley died in 1826 and was immersed in 70 gallons of rum to be sent downriver to Pittsburgh for burial. (Her grave there has since been located.) There also was the unlucky John McCormick, who attempted desertion — one of the worst crimes you could commit in the military at the time — and had his ears clipped for it; he allegedly commented, "This is a hell of a way, Colonel, of celebrating the Fourth of July in this country."

Small details, such as former occupations and place of birth, can be equally enlightening. Juza discovered that the soldiers at Fort Atkinson included former shoemakers, wheelwrights, hatters, couriers, bakers, coppersmiths, weavers and other trades. Some were born overseas in places

like Ireland, Germany, France, Russia, Scotland, England and Switzerland.

Juza also records infractions the men committed: intoxication, forgery, attempted shootings and assault, to name a few. Punishments included forfeited pay, a shaved head, solitary confinement and even losing whiskey rations. Some men racked up lengthy lists of infractions, despite multiple punishments.

Others rose to leadership at the fort and went on to

prominent military careers; two such men were Bennet Riley and Henry Leavenworth, for whom the still operational Fort Riley and Fort Leavenworth in Kansas were named. For these men and others with notable careers, Juza includes details about their lives after the fort, such as marriages, children, accomplishments and place of death.

Nearly all of her information comes from primary sources, including military records, personal diaries, personal letters and other firsthand accounts. To track down these

documents, Juza contacted or visited historical societies from eight states and traveled six times to the National Archives in Washington, D.C., sifting through disconnected and sometimes mislabeled files. "The first time I went to the National Archives, I thought I would go in and say, 'I'm researching Fort Atkinson, these are the years,' and they would come out with a big folder and there would be all the documents. It's nothing like that," she said.

Despite that, the research trips went well, Juza said,



Susan Juza pictured at Fort Atkinson with her "book of names" and other materials she used for research. ERIC FOWLER, NEBRASKALAND



each one leading to new questions and another visit to D.C. “Each time I find new information it adds to the big puzzle,” she said. “Sometimes, because of all the research, I feel like I really have been to the original Fort Atkinson and I really do know all these people.”

The bulk of her research took three years and was completed in 2000, but she doesn’t consider the project finished. “Research never ends,” Juza said.

What she’s found most rewarding from the work is meeting descendants of the people she’s researched, some of whom have discovered their ancestors during a trip to the fort. When she meets them, “I feel like I know them,” Juza said. She hopes one day to bring everyone together for a “family reunion” at Fort Atkinson.

In the meantime, the men and women in the book have gained new life through Fort Atkinson’s living history program. New volunteers are encouraged to adopt a persona from the book, perhaps someone they have things in common with. “It makes it more personal to them, and they can learn more about that person and actually portray [their role] better,” said park superintendent Jason Grof.

Juza also helped create a commemorative monument at the park, called the Monument to the Deceased, listing the names of everyone known to have died at the fort and in the surrounding area.

Asked what draws her to this work, Juza described her love of history, saying, “When I look at a name, I don’t want it to just be a name. I want to understand the person behind the name and not forget them.”

For those who have benefited from her research, that’s exactly what she’s accomplished. 

LEFT: Fourth of July Living History weekend at Fort Atkinson State Historical Park in Fort Calhoun.

JENNY NGUYEN-WHEATLEY, NEBRASKALAND



Soldiers march with reenactor Bob Baker in the lead during a living history presentation at Fort Atkinson. JENNY NGUYEN-WHEATLEY, NEBRASKALAND

Visiting Fort Atkinson

Fort Atkinson State Historical Park is located in Fort Calhoun, which is about 17 miles north of Omaha in eastern Nebraska.

The visitor center is open daily from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. between May 1 and Oct. 31. From Nov. 1 through April 30, the center is open by appointment only.

The Park’s grounds are open daily from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. between May 1 and Oct. 31. From Nov. 1 through April 30, the park is open from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.

A park entry permit is required and may be purchased at the park, statewide Game and Parks offices, online, or via permit vendors in advance of your arrival.



Your Camera Doesn't See Like You Do

Part 3 of 3

Story and photos by Chris Helzer

Have you ever been frustrated because some parts of a photo are way too bright while others are so dark you can't see any details? Why does the image on the screen of your phone or camera look so much less vibrant and impressive than the gorgeous sunset in front of you? Simply put, your camera doesn't see the world the way you do.

The first two parts of this series covered the more mechanical aspects of photography, including field of view, focus, aperture and shutter speed. Mastering these is a critical part of becoming a good photographer. However, the difference between good photographers and great photographers is the way they see and use light. The two most important aspects of light for photographers to pay attention to are its intensity and quality.

Light Intensity

Your camera's sensor can't handle wide ranges of light intensity. When the sky is much brighter than the land beneath it, one or the other is going to look wrong, especially when there are features on land that create shadows beneath them (trees, buildings, etc.). Either the sky will be so bright that all details are washed out or the land will look abnormally dark, with completely black shadows. Your eyes actually have the same limitations, but your brain quickly compensates as you scan different parts of a scene, your irises growing and shrinking as you do so.



The mid-morning sun was getting pretty intense for photography by the time this photo was taken, but because there are few shadows in the image, there is limited contrast to deal with and the photo still works.

The easiest way to avoid problems with light intensity is to shoot when the sun is not blazing at full strength in the middle of the day. When the sun is super bright, the contrast in tone between brightly lit and shadowed areas is well beyond the range a camera's sensor can handle. We'll talk more about that below. Sometimes, however, the events you want to photograph happen during periods of high light intensity and you just have to deal with it.

One strategy is to select parts of the scene that eliminate either the darkest or brightest parts. For example, you may be able to photograph a landscape from a high point where

you can point the camera down enough to either eliminate or greatly reduce the amount of sky in the photo. The amount of contrast between the brightly lit and shadowed part of the landscape may still be problematic, but at least you don't have to worry about the even brighter sky itself. Another option is to move in closer and focus on only the shadowed or brightly lit portions of a scene, rather than trying to incorporate both.

Often, however, even with those compensating strategies, you'll look at an image on your LCD screen and see that you're losing either the highlights or shadows. If your camera shows

you the histogram (a graph of captured light intensity) for each image, you'll see that one of the two "tails" of the graph are outside the histogram frame. If you can adjust exposure to get both tails in the frame, you're golden. If you can't, your best option is often to "shoot dark" by adjusting exposure so the details within the brightest parts of the scene are captured, regardless of how dark that makes the shadows.

Later, you can use whatever photo editing software you have access to and try to recapture some of the details in those dark shadows. In order to "shoot dark," of course, you have to understand how your camera reads light and how to



An example of “shooting dark” on a bright sunny day. The top photo is the way I shot it, and the photo on the bottom is what it looked like after editing.



Golden late-day light created beautiful warm colors in this scene, and the lower light intensity from a setting sun reduced the contrast between highlights and shadows.

control that process. Whether you use your phone or a high-end digital SLR camera, your camera’s light meter is designed to create images with a nice middle tone — not too bright, not too dark. Much of the time, that’s really helpful, whether you’re allowing the camera to set exposure for you or doing it yourself. However, the “middle tone” attitude of your light meter can create problems when you want to capture photos with more dramatic lighting, or when the subject itself is naturally brighter or darker than a middle tone (snow, white flowers, the face of a bison, etc.).

Most cameras allow for some kind of “spot metering,” with which you can select which part of a scene you want your camera to gauge light intensity. When light intensity isn’t crazy high, spot metering means you can select the part of the scene you want to be a middle tone and set your exposure based on that. Or, you can select something that you want to be brighter than middle tone (snow, for example) and adjust your aperture/shutter speed settings to brighten the image more than the camera’s meter would recommend so the snow

looks white instead of gray.

When you have a situation with intense light and high contrast, though, you can meter off the brighter areas and adjust exposure settings so it is captured as a middle tone. That will make the rest of the image dark, but you can “fix that in post.” If you don’t have time to mess with a spot meter, or your camera doesn’t give you that option, another strategy is to make sure the sky makes up more than 50% of the image. Most cameras, when allowed to make exposure decisions by themselves, will try to make sure the majority of an image is a middle tone, so if most of the image is bright sky, the sky will look OK in your photo, but shadowed areas below will look very dark. That’s the best you can do in that situation.

As mentioned earlier, the best way to avoid issues with excessive light intensity is to avoid shooting when the light is too bright. The clear blue-sky afternoons so often rhapsodized about by many people are actually the worst-case scenario for photographers. Early mornings, evenings,

and bright overcast periods produce much less intense light, giving your camera a chance to capture the entire range of tones in a scene. Coincidentally, those periods are also when the light quality tends to be highest as well.

Light Quality

There are several factors that contribute to good light quality in photography. Intensity is an important one, but two others are **color** and **direction**. In outdoor photography, color is determined by the path the sun’s rays take on the way to your subject. Early and late in the day, when the sun is low in the sky, it usually has a golden or reddish appearance because of how much of the atmosphere its light passes through before you see it. During the middle of a sunny day, that light is very white, as well as bright. The color of the light hitting a subject influences the color bouncing off that subject — which is what your camera captures. If you look at the sun (don’t look at the sun) and see color, that color will show up in your photo too.

Bright overcast light is coveted by many photographers because it creates beautiful even lighting on a subject. When the sun passes through clouds but still creates faint shadows, it creates the kind of diffused light that portrait photographers pour lots of time and equipment to creating artificially. Bright overcast light is fantastic for close-up photos with gorgeous saturated color and fine detail, as well as for portrait-like photos of certain subjects. It works less well for large landscape photos because the lack of contrast across the scene can make it look relatively flat. In addition, if the sky is included in a landscape photo, it usually comes



A bright overcast day provided perfect lighting for this bison photo. Higher intensity light would have made it difficult to expose correctly for both the dark face and bright wildflowers around it.



The backlighting on this image provides both interesting color and texture. Having the tree partially block the sun cut down on lens flare.

out as a vast expanse of boring monotone light gray.

In addition to color and diffusion, the orientation of the sun’s rays relative to you and your subject also are important. A subject or scene looks very different when the sun is behind you, versus in front of you. Much of that is determined by the number and size of the shadows visible in the image. While photography is simpler when the sun is directly behind you, some of the most striking photographs are made when it’s not.

Shadows help define texture in an image. When the sun is behind you, the shadows are behind the subjects you’re photographing, making the scene look relatively flat. However, when the sun comes across the scene from the side, the resulting shadows emphasize the contours and patterns in the photo. When that light is too intense, shadows can be problematic, but when the camera can pick up both the bright and shadowed portions of a scene, those shadows can

be advantageous.

Photography while facing the sun is tricky, but can be worth experimenting with because of the potential for spectacular results. Sunlight hitting the face of your lens can cause “lens flare,” which creates spots or patterns that can be distracting and unsightly (but sometimes attractive). Those can be minimized by making sure the lens is clean, varying the angle of your shot, and/or shading the lens surface with your hand or a lens hood. There are lots of ways backlit scenes can fail, but if you’re shooting with a digital camera, it doesn’t cost you anything to experiment.

If you learn to recognize the intensity and quality of light, it’s relatively easy to figure out how to use that light effectively. It’s not impossible to create striking images in bright mid-day light, but it can be a real challenge to find appropriate subject matter and deal with problematic contrast issues. Alternately, when golden sunlight courses

across a landscape from a low angle, creating soft shadows and warm highlights, making beautiful photographs is a lot easier. Any photographer can get lucky and take a spectacular photo now and then, but a technically savvy photographer who understands light can do it consistently. [N](#)

You and your camera see the world differently, but if you understand those differences, you can take control of how your photographs turn out. No matter what kind of camera you have, the basics of focal length, aperture, shutter speed, depth of field, and light are the same. It’s ok to let your camera automatically control some of those factors, as long as you understand what it’s doing and when/how you might want to override it. Your camera can’t get you up early to photograph the sunset or help you sneak up on a bobolink, but once you’re in the right place at the right time, your camera can help you make spectacular images.

Sketching Ash Hollow in 1851

By David L. Bristow,
History Nebraska

Arkansas artist
William Minor
Quesenbury, circa
1870s.

COURTESY OF THE SHILOH MUSEUM
OF OZARK HISTORY (S-96-69)



Imagine sitting in a darkened theater watching a giant canvas on stage. The canvas is spooled at either end and advances like a giant scroll. Painted on the canvas are scenes of the Oregon Trail. A narrator describes the great journey that thousands of your fellow citizens are making.

The giant scroll was called the Pantoscope, and it was big hit in Eastern theaters in the 1850s. Designed and promoted by entrepreneur J. Wesley Jones, it was based on sketches and photographs made along the trail by several artists and photographers that Jones hired for the project.

The Pantoscope and most of the original images are lost, except for those of one of the artists, William Quesenbury (CUSH-en-berry). The *Omaha World-Herald* purchased his sketchbook and donated it to History Nebraska.

David Murphy of History Nebraska co-authored a book about Quesenbury titled *Scenery, Curiosities and Stupendous Rocks*. He visited places “Cush” had sketched and was impressed with the artist’s accuracy. Some of the sketches were labeled, but most were not.

The one shown here was not, but its placement in the sketchbook led Murphy to believe it portrayed Ash

Hollow, an important stop along the trail and now a state historical park. A drawing made in 1851 would be one of the earliest views of the site and would show the area during the peak of westward migration.

To be sure, Murphy studied topographic maps and then visited Ash Hollow. He carried a copy of the sketch to help identify the place where his view matched the lines on the paper. When he found the spot, he was looking northeast toward the Platte Valley.

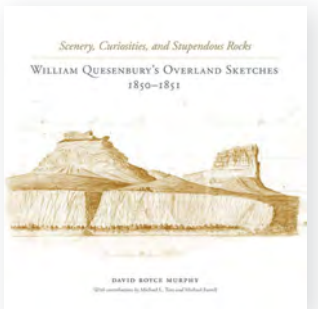
One big difference was all the trees that now obscure the 1850s view of the valley. Fire suppression allows them to grow thick, and present-day travelers aren’t cutting them down for firewood. Here’s how Jones described the scene for the Pantoscope: “Winding over precipitous crags, we descend through Ash Hollow, to the north branch of the Platte River in the distance. It takes its name from the fine groves of ash trees which ... have nearly succumbed to the necessities of the traveller, who here lays in a supply of fuel to boil his coffee, for the next 200 miles affords not even a schrub large enough for a walking stick.” 

Visit *History Nebraska’s website* at history.nebraska.gov.

“Ash Hollow, takes its name from the fine grove of ash trees which ... have nearly succumbed to the necessities of the traveler ...”

– J. Wesley Jones

David Murphy of
History Nebraska
co-authored a book
about artist William
Quesenbury titled
*Scenery, Curiosities and
Stupendous Rocks*.



This 1851 sketch by William Quesenbury is one of the earliest images of Ash Hollow.

OMAHA WORLD-HERALD QUESENBUARY SKETCHBOOK, HISTORY NEBRASKA 8783-5



A view from Windlass Hill at Ash Hollow State Historical Park in Garden County shows the valley where pioneers found fresh spring water and camped along the Oregon Trail. ERIC FOWLER, NEBRASKALAND

Floating on a Breeze

A hot air balloon ride is a superb way to enjoy the scenery

Story and photos by Justin Haag

Old West Balloon Fest, an annual hot air balloon event near Mitchell, at Mitchell Airfield in Scotts Bluff County.



As Nebraskaland photographers, we do our best to attain the ultimate vantage of a given subject. In an effort to capture the attractive landscapes of western Nebraska, I have taken photos from atop many high buttes and from the cockpit of airplanes and helicopters. My new favorite, though, is the oldest of human-carrying flight technology: hot air balloon.

I was not sure what to expect when my cameras and I were invited to ride the skies during the Old West Balloon Fest in August 2020. I had recently watched the *The Aeronauts*, the 2019 action-adventure movie about a 1860s gas balloon pilot and scientist who had ventured to fly higher than anyone had flown before. It is a great show full of hair-raising moments, but I would advise first-time balloon riders to watch it after their first flight instead of before it.

Any anxiety was all for naught, though. One would be hard-pressed to find a smoother mode of travel than this one.

Shortly after sunrise on that late summer morning, my 13-year-old daughter and assistant, Kiera, and I boarded our space on *Teal Octopus* amid the hubbub of the excited festival crowd. After climbing into the basket, we received flight instructions from pilot Gary Maguire of Allenspark, Colorado, as he occasionally pulled the trigger to send flames into the massive structure above us. In what seemed an instant, he gave orders to untether the vessel, and we were off.

The takeoff was so smooth that we would not have realized the balloon was leaving the ground if our eyes were closed. As we rose above and among the dozens of other balloons — each more than 50 feet wide and about seven stories tall — I caught a glance of my daughter and the wonder in her eyes. As I gazed over the North Platte Valley, decorated with other balloons, I surely knew what she was feeling.

Not only is the liftoff smooth, the open air is extremely calm. The best way to avoid the effects of a wind or breeze is to travel with it, after all. Throughout the entire flight, there were no sudden jerks of turbulence and no wind in the hair.

Even though the ride is smooth, there is a certain element of adventure to going up in a hot air balloon. The pilot can control the up and down with the flame, but the direction of the vessel is dependent on the breeze. Mother Nature took us westward from the Mitchell Airfield over the North Platte River, the city of Mitchell and agricultural fields below.

Even though the cockpit was a little tight for reaching gear and exchanging lenses, the peaceful ride was perfect for snapping images, and Maguire skillfully put me at the right altitudes to do so. Time sped by as I captured other balloons picturesquely juxtaposed with a backdrop of the Wildcat Hills. The 35-minute flight seemed to end just as soon as it

Pictured is “Big Top,” a balloon owned by Mark Whiting of Centennial, Colorado. Hot air balloon rides are the perfect adventure for photographers and those looking for a leisurely stroll across the sky.





A photo taken from the “Teal Octopus,” a balloon owned by Douglas Gary Maguire of Allenspark, Colorado, shows the Old West Balloon Fest at Mitchell Airfield in Scotts Bluff County.

started.

The roughest part of the whole experience was the landing. Despite our pilot’s capable skills and experience flying all over Europe and the United States, the wind will do what the wind does and the big balloon shall go with it. After a couple of attempts at a “standing landing,” Maguire advised us to brace ourselves because “we’re going over.”

Upon touchdown, the gondola went to its side and skidded to a stop. The three of us, stacked horizontally, looked at one another with a hearty laugh.

As soon as Maguire coached us from the basket and our feet were on the ground, another balloon was coming in for a landing nearby. As he had done many times in the past, Maguire raced to get a hand on the basket and help those

passengers have a much smoother landing than ours.

The Teal Octopus’ trailer, which had been following us from below, soon arrived, and we loaded up the balloon. Amazingly, the vessel that seemed so large moments before was neatly packed into the small space of the trailer. Upon returning to the festival grounds, the veteran pilot regaled us with a traditional ballooning story and a toast. The perfect ending to an amazing experience.

Those who have not experienced this mode of travel have opportunities to do so. The Nebraska Balloon Club’s website, nebraskaballoonclub.org, has a directory of about 25 pilots who charter flights.

For those who want to experience balloon culture but stay grounded, many opportunities exist.

Coming into its sixth year Aug. 11-14, the Old West Balloon Fest has grown from 18 to more than 80 balloons and has become the site of the U.S. National Hot Air Ballooning Championships. The competition challenges pilots to fly to specific locations in the sky and drop sand bags on ground targets. The event’s night glows and mass ascensions entertain thousands.

Other popular events in Nebraska include the Nebraska Balloon & Wine Festival at Elkhorn, Falls City Hot Air Balloon Festival, and Blues and Balloons Festival at Springfield.

Technology surely will continue pushing aircraft farther and faster. Whether riding in the gondola or observing from below, however, this oldest form of human air transport will surely continue to amaze people for generations to come. 



ABOVE: Unloading the Woolly Bugger, a balloon owned by Justin Elkins of Helena, Montana.

BELOW: Candlesticking.



The Old West Balloon
Fest near Mitchell in
Scotts Bluff County
draws visitors from
across the region.



Rock Creek Lake State Recreation Area

Serenity in southwestern Nebraska

By Julie Geiser

At the very southwestern corner of Nebraska in Dundy County lies a truly serene area that is sure to surprise those that venture there. Rock Creek Lake State Recreation Area is a small 54-acre area, with a 50-acre lake fed by the cold spring waters of Rock Creek.

Located 4 miles north and a mile east of Parks, Nebraska, this quaint SRA has primitive camping only at roughly 43 non-pad sites, one vault toilet and five primitive restrooms. A new water well is slated for completion this summer. The area offers numerous picnic tables and grills for both day use and camping.

The lake opened in 1935 and was an 80-acre body of water that was the deepest lake in the state at the time. Back then the lake was stocked with bass, trout, crappies and bullheads.

Currently, the lake's fishery is on the rebound after going through a renovation.

In 2019, fish surveys showed significant declines in

abundance and growth of largemouth bass and other sport fish due to the high numbers of gizzard shad in the lake. In 2020, the lake underwent a fish renovation to improve water quality and sportfish potential by eliminating the shad. Sport fish were salvaged from the lake before rotenone was applied to remove undesirable fish. In an effort to prevent accidental introduction of gizzard shad again, a "No Live Baitfish" regulation is now in place.

The lake was restocked last fall with largemouth bass, black crappie and yellow perch. Adult redear sunfish along with adult largemouth bass and channel catfish are planned to be stocked this year. Rainbow and tiger trout will not be stocked back into the lake until spring of 2022 to allow the stocked fish to gain a good foothold.

Typically, Rock Creek is one of Nebraska's great trout fisheries and is known for holding some of the biggest largemouth bass around. Sean Farrier, fisheries biologist for the lake, is confident the lake will return as a trophy fishery: "About year three after a renovation, the fish will take off, and we'll be seeing some of those bigger fish again," he said.



Rock Creek Lake SRA is located roughly 4 miles to the northwest of Parks, which is 1 mile off of highway 34 to the north and 10 miles west of Benkelman. The area has a 50-acre lake with 54 acres of land. This area offers camping, hiking, boating, fishing and picnicking, as well as primitive camping. A park entry permit is required and may be purchased at Game and Parks offices and permit vendors or in advance of your arrival online.



An aerial photo shows Rock Creek Lake State Recreation Area in Dundy County.

ERIC FOWLER, NEBRASKALAND

Boats can launch from the boat ramp and dock that is visible when you enter the SRA. All boats are allowed at Rock Creek, and it's not uncommon to see large bass boats to smaller jon boats and kayaks on the no-wake lake.

Whether it's fishing, camping, hiking or a quiet place to relax, consider Rock Creek SRA this summer.

Rock Creek Hatchery

Rock Creek State Fish Hatchery sits just north of the SRA at the headwaters of Rock Creek. Established in 1924 because of the abundant coldwater spring flow. It is one of five state fish hatcheries operated by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission. Rock Creek Hatchery produces nearly half of the trout stocked annually in Nebraska. Rainbow, brown, and hybrid tiger trout, are a staple at the hatchery. Other fish raised at the hatchery include: wipers, bluegill, bluegill green sunfish hybrids, rock bass, yellow perch, redear sunfish, and grass carp.

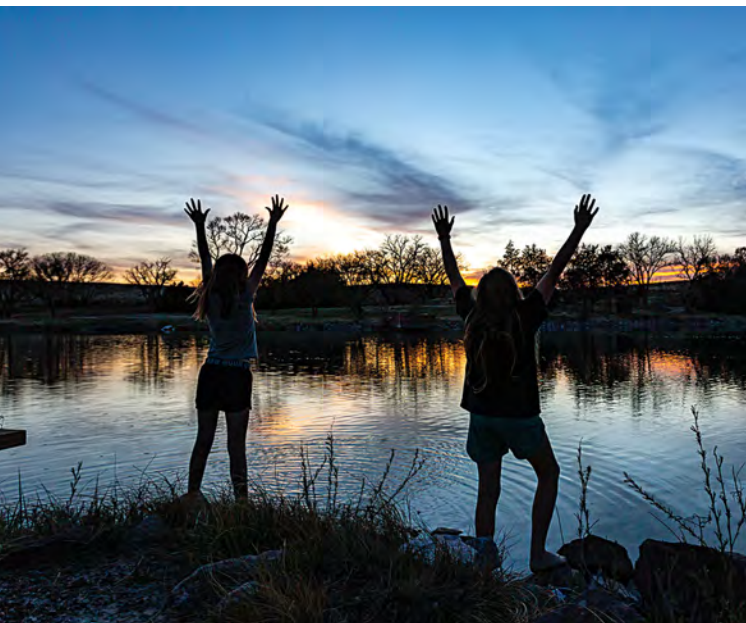
Rock Creek Hatchery is overseen by Julie Fraley, the state's first woman fish production manager. Fraley started working at the hatchery in 2012 before earning her new position there.

The hatchery is open to the public. To schedule a tour, call (308) 423-2080, or check out our latest video on the hatchery on the Commission's YouTube channel. [📺](#)



These trout swim in a hatchery pond at Rock Creek hatchery and will soon be stocked into Nebraska waters.

JULIE GEISER, NEBRASKALAND



Paislee Erickson, right and Elyn Bargmann reach for the last light of the sun from one of the fishing nodes. The nodes are great for picnicking as well. JULIE GEISER, NEBRASKALAND

SOMETHING SQUIRMY?

By Julie Van Meter, State Entomologist
Nebraska Department of Agriculture

Invasive species can come in many shapes and sizes. Often, when we think of invasive species, we imagine beetles attacking trees, or plants clogging our waterways. Sometimes, though, the invasive species may be right under our feet.

Two such invasive species are the **crazy worm** and the **hammerhead worm**. Crazy worms (*Amyntas* species and *Metaphire* species), also known as Asian jumping worms, are native to east Asia, but have been reported across much of North America over the past several years. These worms look like typical earthworms, and are brownish, grayish or reddish. One identification characteristic is the clitellium, the cloudy white band found on mature worms. The clitellium on crazy worms is flush with the body (not raised up as with other worms) and completely encircles the worm. Crazy worms also can be identified by their behavior – they will thrash their bodies wildly when disturbed.

Crazy worms overwinter as immatures in cocoons, emerge in the spring, and reach maturing by mid-summer. They consume the organic matter in the soil, changing the soil structure. This can affect native plant health and reduce



Left: Crazy worms. Right: Hammerhead worm
JODY GREEN, UNL EXTENSION

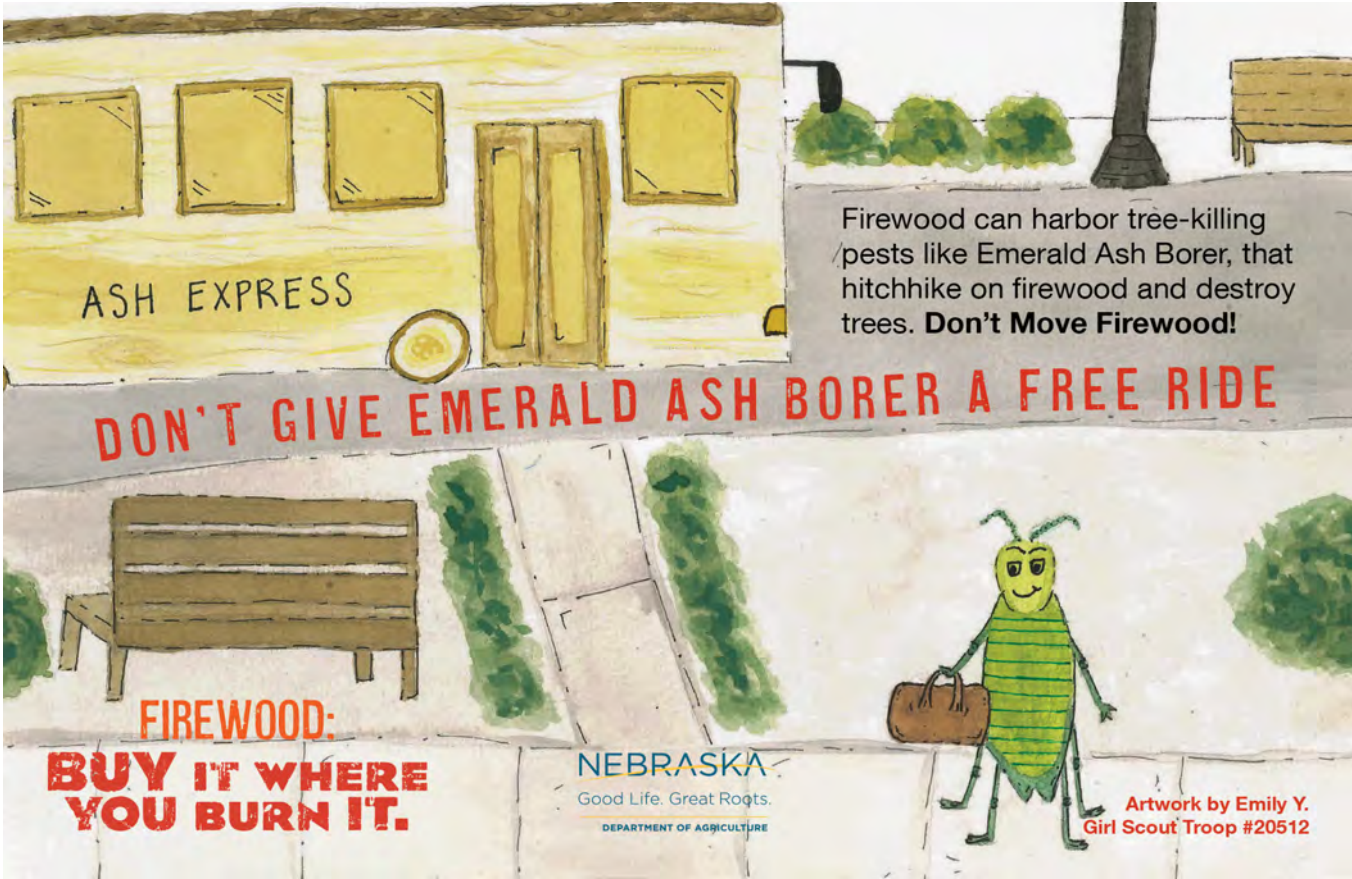
plant diversity.

The hammerhead worm (*Bipalium* species) is a flatworm that has likely been in the U.S. for more than 100 years. At least four species of hammerhead worms have been reported across the U.S. Hammerhead worms can be gray, brown or even green in color, and their length can vary from 1.5–12 inches depending on species. The distinctive characteristic of these worms is their flattened, spade-shaped head.

Hammerhead worms reproduce both sexually and asexually. If a hammerhead worm is cut in two, or the tail breaks off, both segments have the potential to regenerate a full body.

Hammerhead worms are predatory, live at the soil surface in leaf litter, and feed at night. They will snack on earthworms, insects, and even snails and slugs. Some hammerhead worms can produce a neurotoxin so handling them is not advised.

Report possible sightings of these invasive worms in Nebraska to the Nebraska Invasive Species Program at neinvasives.com.



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BUILT LIKE A BRICK ... Concrete restrooms are a big deal at parks.

By Justin Haag

It is always nice to have our work recognized.

With that in mind, a message from a coworker brought a smile to my face this winter. “Dang pretty pic of that crapper!” he wrote.

He had noticed, apparently with some envy, a photo of a new concrete latrine accompanying my news release about a long list of capital improvements at Chadron State Park.

Having worked in media for more than a quarter of a century, I am no stranger to a spirited discussion about newsworthiness of a given topic. This is one such case. As someone said, people expect parks to have a bathroom, so is it really a big deal when they get new ones?

That is a great point. However, I remain impressed by the modern concrete showerhouses and latrines, scores of which have been installed at our state parks and recreation areas during the past decade. They are

certainly a big improvement over the wood structures they replaced.

One asset, perhaps surprisingly for a restroom, is appearance. Despite the concrete make-up, these models excel at mimicking more attractive materials, such as wood siding and cedar shake shingles. The concrete showerhouse at Fort Robinson State Park’s Soldier Creek Campground, installed in 2018, is molded to match the same white siding of the many historical buildings on the property, for instance.

You’ve certainly heard the term that something is “built like a brick ...”? Well, concrete works pretty well, too. With roofs strong enough to support a few hundred pounds per square foot and walls that deflect wind gusts in excess of 150 mph, the fireproof structures would surely garner admiration from the Three Little Pigs.

The same coworker who tongue-in-cheek complimented me for my photo

later sent me an image he had captured of damages from a vandal’s shotgun blast. While the exterior was pitted from the shot, it merely marred the surface. (Side note: Such vandalism surely serves as a sad commentary on the smarts of those who commit it. “Hey, let’s damage this nice thing that was paid for with our permit and fee dollars, and complain when they charge us more for permits and fees to fix it.”)

Vandalism aside, concrete models also require less maintenance than those of other building materials, allowing parks to put that time and resources into other, perhaps more brochure-worthy, areas of the park.

Regardless of whether or not these structures deserve as much space in print as, say, a new floating playground or ropes course, you surely agree they are a big deal. After all, no park attraction is more important than this one when you need it.



Concrete latrines and showerhouses, such as this one at Fort Robinson State Park’s Soldier Creek campground, are resilient and complement other architecture on the property. JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKALAND

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A HOT TIME FOR DEER PREP

The road to fall hunting success often starts in the summer.

By Justin Haag

Just as the big buck's mind is far from its ambitious activities of fall at this time of year, so too is the mind of many a deer hunter. Hardcore hunters will tell you it is never too early to start thinking about the big bucks of fall, though.

Justin Powell of Alliance, a deer hunter and wildlife biologist for the Game and Parks Commission, said hunters increase chances for success by putting in time during the dog days of summer — even if just getting out with binoculars to see what is happening in the woods. While there, one might as well put up trail cameras, tree stands and blinds where allowed.

“It's best to get those critters accustomed to having these things in the woods,” he said. “If you put them up right at hunting season, the animals are going to be a little skittish. With trail cameras, you will not only be able to monitor buck growth and see what's roaming around in your hunting areas, but you can also catch any trespassers and address that issue before the season starts.”

Speaking of property rights, landowners are often more agreeable about being approached for permission to hunt well in advance of the season. It also gives hunters time to do something in return before chasing deer.

“Summer is a good time to meet landowners and even lend a hand for jobs like fencing and mowing,” Powell said.

With permission, other work now also will pay dividends come deer season. Mowing trails and cutting branches are prime examples, he said.

“When you're going in to a blind or tree stand at low light come deer season, having an easy trail to get to your spot is helpful,” he said. “Not only does it make things easier for the hunter, but also makes it a lot quieter so you don't spook animals on the way in.”

Powell said the trails also create patterns in movement and cut branches attract wildlife.

“Animals usually travel the path of least resistance, so

you can help determine where they'll be walking come fall,” he said. “I've found that cutting branches of a tree, even on the same day you sit in your stand, can help attract a deer. I've had deer come up to eat the fresh green leaves on a cut branch right under my tree stand. Come rut, bucks will also use them as a place to drop scent with rubs and scrapes.”

Mowing also can produce fresh forage that is more attractive to deer than stagnant vegetation. Hunters even have time in late summer to plant certain cool-season forage, such as turnips and rye, to draw in deer.

With all of those preparations, hunters definitely want the right thing to happen when finally releasing the bowstring or pulling the trigger.

“Summer evenings, when the wind is calm, is a great time to be out with a bow, rifle or shotgun to get them tuned in at different ranges,” Powell said.

And, hunters can use this time to ensure a game violation does not ruin the experience.

Studying the rules and regulations, including special provisions for hunting public land, also should happen well before the season. For instance, those previously mentioned portable tree

stands and steps may be in place from Aug. 16 through January on state wildlife management areas, but ground blinds must be removed at the end of each day there. State recreation areas and national forest properties have their own set of rules. Details can be found in the Big Game Guide at outdoornebraska.org/guides.

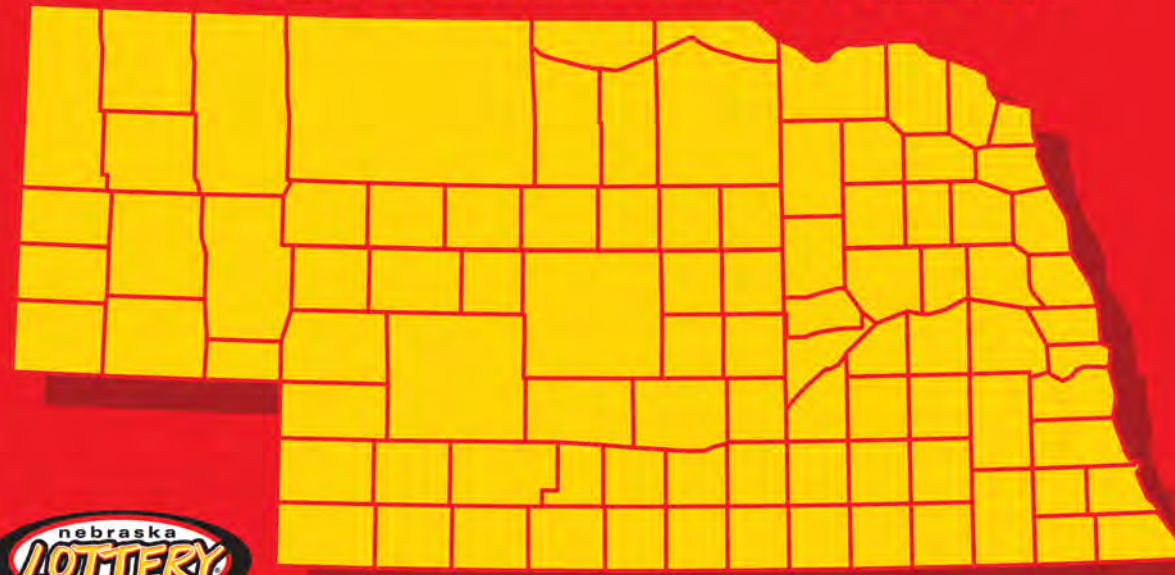
Other tasks for summer include checking gear. Outside of season, the price of hunting accessories is often marked down so it is an advantageous time to stock up. A little cardio and weight training will help the hunter pursue that venison and drag it from the woods.

By paying mind to deer hunting months in advance, hunters will surely have a greater success in making summer dreams come true in autumn.



A mule deer buck, in velvet, in Dawes County. Scouting now leads to shots at deer like this later in the season. JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKALAND

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WOOD DUCK CHOSEN FOR WATERFOWL STAMP

By Justin Haag

A pencil drawing of a wood duck by Hannah Krein, 14, of Harrison, will be featured on the Nebraska waterfowl stamp in 2022.

Krein's art topped a field of about 300 entries to earn best of show during the annual contest, administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and judged by a panel in Scottsbluff in March.

Through a partnership with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, the best of show annually appears on the digital stamp that is required by hunters pursuing waterfowl in the state. The artwork also advances to be judged against



A wood duck by Hannah Krein of Harrison won the 2022 Nebraska waterfowl stamp. JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKALAND

the top entries of the 49 other states in the Federal Junior Duck Stamp Design Contest.

This will be the second consecutive year that a wood duck appears on Nebraska's stamp. An acrylic painting of a wood duck pair, created by Sydney Smith of Morrill, was chosen last year.

The Junior Duck Stamp competition is open to youth in kindergarten through 12th grade. More information about the Junior Duck Stamp Conservation Program and how to enter may be found on the education page of the Fish and Wildlife Service's website, fws.gov.

DON'T MISS THE BOAT

By Shawna Richter-Ryerson

When the heat of summer hits, the lake calls, offering a promise of cool water, sandy beaches, refreshing winds and some of the most authentic natural sights of Nebraska one can find.

More stars than city dwellers ever see fill the sky during a night ride at Merritt Reservoir. Bank swallows dip and dive for dinner at Branched Oak State Recreation Area. Fish fight to prove Charles Darwin's theory — and you can see it — in the clear water at Bridgeport SRA.

For those who already own a boat, it doesn't take much convincing to get on the water, throw on a lifejacket and ride a towable tube or a pair of skis. They're equally easy to convince to throw anchor and float or toss in a fishing line or three.

For them, boat snacks are a way of life.

But for those without a ride, take heart: Days at the lake don't have to be isolated to beachfronts. Vendors at five Nebraska state recreation areas offer day-rate rentals on boats. They include:

- Branched Oak
- Lake McConaughy
- Lake Minatare
- Lake Ogallala
- Merritt Reservoir

At many of these locations, "boat rental" is code for pontoon, so remember to invite family and friends for added fun.

Those looking for a slower pace — AKA no motor — can



Boaters ride their pontoon on Lewis and Clark Lake State Recreation Area. ERIC FOWLER, NEBRASKALAND

rent the following water vessels by the hour at these state park areas:

Kayaks — Branched Oak SRA, Fort Robinson SP, Louisville SRA, Lake McConaughy SRA, Lake Minatare SRA, Pawnee SRA, Sherman Reservoir SRA, and Smith Falls SP

Canoes — Calamus SRA, Louisville SRA, Platte River SP, and Smith Falls SP

Stand-up paddleboards — Branched Oak SRA, Lake McConaughy SRA, and Louisville SRA

Paddleboats — Chadron SP, Louisville SRA, Mahoney SP, Platte River SP, and Victoria Springs SRA

Three-wheel water bikes — Louisville SRA

So this summer, when the thermostat inches toward 90 degrees, remember a beach is great, but a boat ... well, it's just better.



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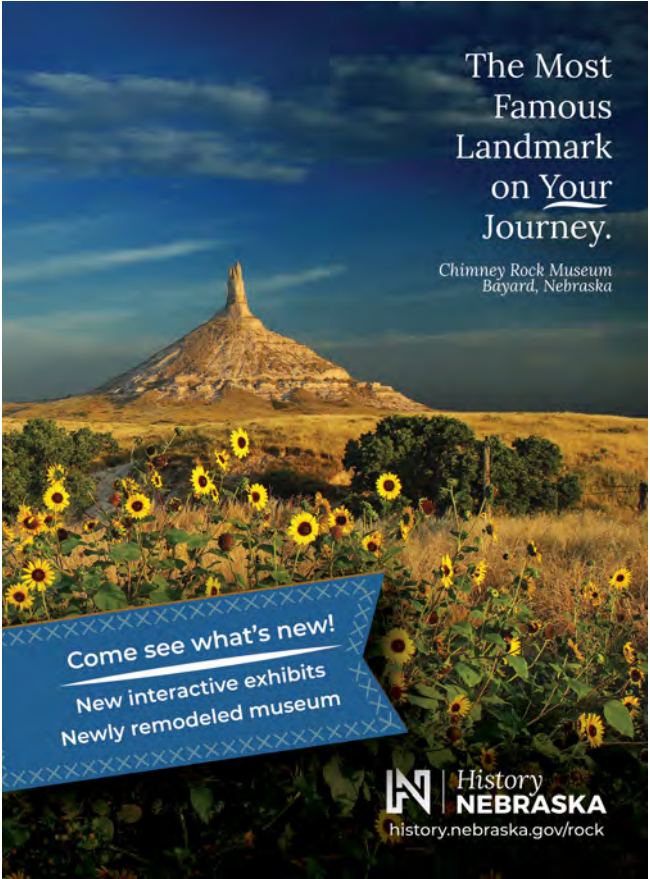
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DREAMING TOGETHER

By Jeff Kurrus

In conservation, nothing gets done alone. The long list of partnerships formed among state and federal agencies, private landowners, natural resources districts and others are reasons why we have places to hunt, fish, and participate in so many other outdoor adventures. But you can't have those partnerships without developing that culture in the first place.

For the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, Director Jim Douglas has been a stalwart supporter of this culture his entire tenure with the agency. "When I became the wildlife division supervisor in 1993," Douglas said, "I created a new section of that division — the partners section — because we were only going to be able to be successful if we formed a lot of partnerships."



DIRECTOR JIM DOUGLAS

These partnerships, Douglas said, have been established on car rides and around bonfires. For example, Clayton Stalling, a former private lands biologist for the Commission, would organize "stump speeches" around the bonfire during conferences, where everyone was required to talk about the challenges their organizations were facing on various conservation fronts.

Now, the Commission's culture is so focused on these partnerships that it's become the very fabric of everything it does. Kristal Stoner, executive director for Audubon Nebraska

and former wildlife diversity program manager with the Commission, saw it firsthand. "Douglas recognized that the conservation field in Nebraska is relatively small compared to the needs we had, so he understood we couldn't do this work alone," she said.

Stoner's work focused on a plan to conserve at-risk species in the state, so she, Douglas, and their colleagues would reach out to the people doing the work and ask what their needs were. "By partnering, you could capitalize on the strengths of other conservation organizations, and you're transparent and concerned with what works best for everyone.

"We all have our limitations and strengths," Stoner continued. "Some work in the field, some have robust education platforms, some speak to decision makers. Not every organization has everything. If we just combine forces and capitalize on who has what, the work moves forward, and we're able to help wildlife."

This same concept works in education as well. Monica Macoubrie, wildlife education specialist with the Commission, said partnerships are "just what we do." She and her colleagues work with grade school teachers and students, representatives from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, the Nature Conservancy, and zoos to name a few.

"We help them, and they help us," Macoubrie said, a theme throughout the agency statewide. "If it helps you do your job, go do it." And partnerships do just that.

"We want to work with as many different people as possible," Douglas said, and he wants to establish personal relationships with each of them. "If you have a personal relationship, you can dream together."

And once you start dreaming together, you start forming a plan to make those dreams a reality.

Nebraska Game and Parks Commission partners with the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Entomology Department to monitor the population of Salt Creek tiger beetles. Many groups, including the Saline Wetlands Conservation Partnership, Lower Platte South Natural Resources District, City of Lincoln, Omaha's Henry Doorly Zoo and Aquarium, Lincoln Children's Zoo, Topeka Zoo & Conservation Center, volunteers and others are involved in conserving Salt Creek tiger beetles, and partnerships like these are the foundation of the Commission.

ERIC FOWLER, NEBRASKALAND



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Hunting South of the farm on the trailrace east of Columbus 1977. Carroll Mellinger and his sons, son-in-law and oldest grandson display their successful opening day pheasants. It was a family tradition to all gather on opening weekend. Breaded and fried pheasant were always on the menu for the first day.

Chad Blahak, Joe Blahak, Dennis Ryba, Al Kluever, Dave Mellinger, Carroll Mellinger, and Greg Mellinger.

– Diane Blahak, Lincoln



Coyote Hunt 1919. This is a photo of my cousins of the Green and Stevens families of Polk, Nebraska, after a successful coyote hunt using dogs.

The other photo (left) shows my brothers Roy Green (pictured left) and Wayne Green after trapping a raccoon near the Big Blue River southeast of Stromsburg about 1963.

– Merlin Green, Lincoln



Late November Duck Hunt 1983. Pictured from left are Scott Schroth; Joe Francis; Bones (Joe's Lab); Satch (my Lab); and me. The bag included buffleheads, bluebills, redheads, widgeon and mallards. We hunted on the Salt Valley Lakes, near Lincoln.

No permanent blinds were allowed so we hiked about 3/4 mile from the parking lot carrying our homemade portable blind and two dozen decoys. The competition to be the first to claim a location was quite intense in those days and we regarded this spot (nicknamed Cedar Point) as the best in the Salt Valley. Many others did, too. As Satch was retrieving the last duck, a boat blind motored up to be the next to hunt there — they had monitored us with binoculars and knew exactly when we had reached our point system limit.

Scott has passed away, while Joe and I still live in Lincoln. (Photos by Mary Schroth.)

– Douglas Blaine Harris, Lincoln



Clarence and Henry, coyotes 1940.

My brother, Dale Helms, from Holbrook, Nebraska, has sent the Nebraskaland Magazine to me and my five siblings in various states for more than 10 years as a Christmas gift. I haven't lived in Nebraska for more than 50 years but enjoy the articles and pictures you feature each month. I now realize I need to come back as a tourist and visit those places I've never seen. Pictured are brothers Clarence (19) and Henry (17) Helms with two coyote pelts on the corncrib door in Gosper County.

– Chris Twidwell, Flagstaff, Arizona

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



ERIC FOWLER, NEBRASKALAND

A BEAUTIFUL MODEL

By Eric Fowler

Quail are difficult birds to photograph. Their size and habitat help insure that.

There is but a short window in the spring where this diminutive game bird is taller than the prairie grasses in which it calls home. The rest of the year, the first hint of their presence typically comes when they flush from your feet and fly away at Mach speed.

Last summer, however, I found one female quail who apparently aspired to be a supermodel. Driving a two-track service road through Rock Glen WMA near Fairbury one evening after checking a camera trap, I spotted a female ahead in the road. I drove to within camera range, made a hard right turn, killed the engine, rested the camera on the window and captured a few images before she scurried into the native tallgrass prairie.

I had seen quail in this exact spot on a previous trip, so on a hunch, I drove ahead, made a U-turn and waited a bit before heading back down the same path.

Sure enough, in the same spot in the road, I spotted a pair.

They let me drive close enough for a photo three times before the male disappeared. But the female wouldn't leave the road. So I decided to try something different and went off road to try and pass her on the right. She didn't seem to mind, walking slowly and pausing in gaps in the grass, seemingly curious as to what this big, brown, purring chunk of metal was doing in her neighborhood.

"Yea, work it baby, work it," I whispered each time she paused.

As luck would have it, my new path was lower, putting my window nearly at her level.

We played leapfrog a few more times before she finally left the road, 20 minutes and 200 yards after the "chase" had begun. Together, the pair provided me with 37 usable images.

Thank you, Mrs. Bob. You were a beautiful model.

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