

NEBRASKAland

Nebraska Game & Parks Commission

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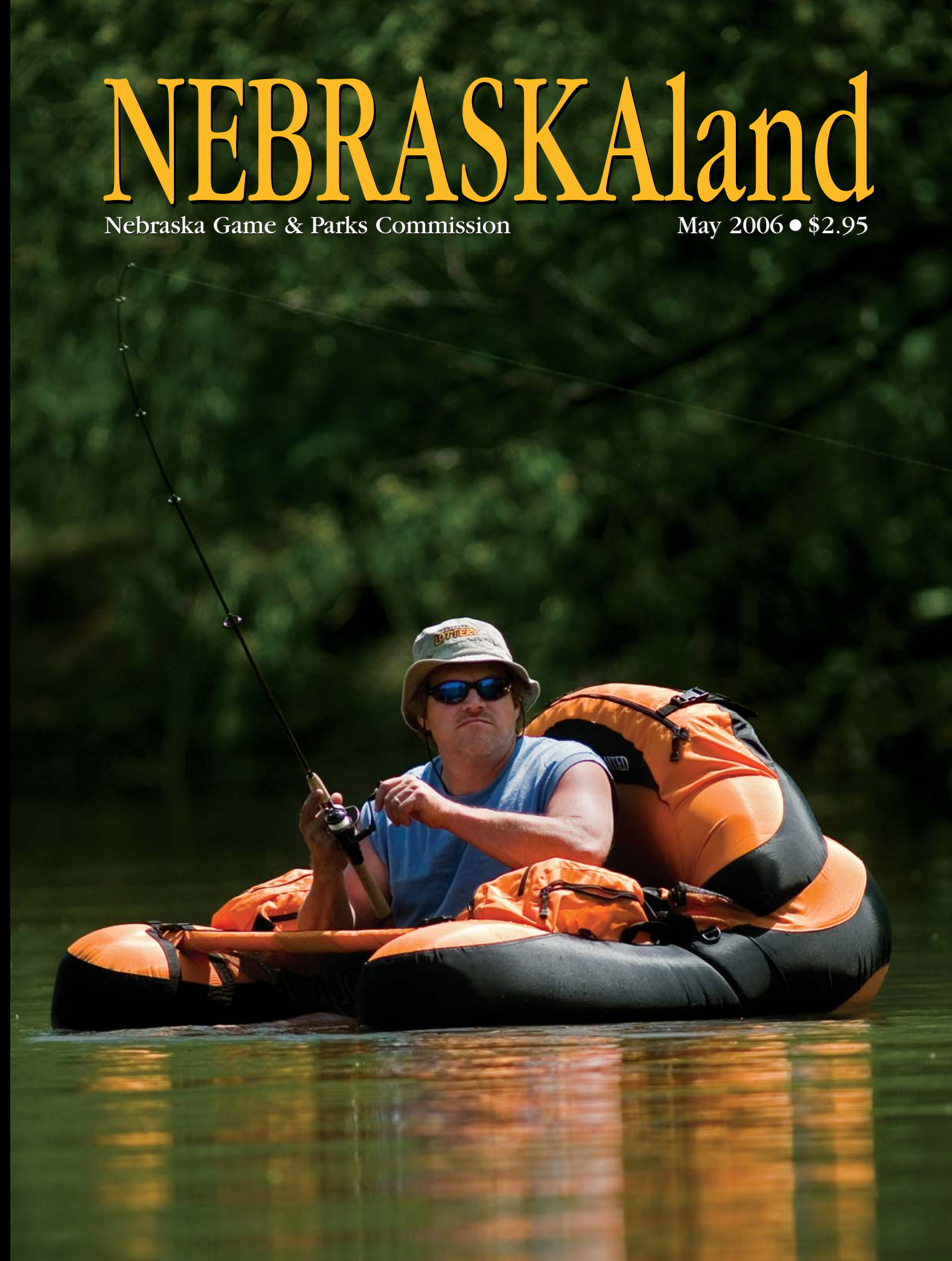
Belted kingfishers are at home anywhere in Nebraska as long as there is a good supply of bite-sized fish nearby. Look for them on branches overhanging shallow water. Photo by Ken Bouc.



NEBRASKAland Magazine

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NEBRASKAland

Volume 84, Number 4, May 2006

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Fishing Across Nebraska

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Cover: Steve Shepard of Eagle fishes for bass from a float tube at Louisville State Recreation Area last May. Photo by Doug Carroll.
Opposite: Smith Falls, the centerpiece of Nebraska's newest state park, delights visitors to its springbranch canyon. Smith Falls State Park is located 12 miles east and 4 miles south of Valentine. Photo by Ken Bouc.



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MARVIN WESLEY

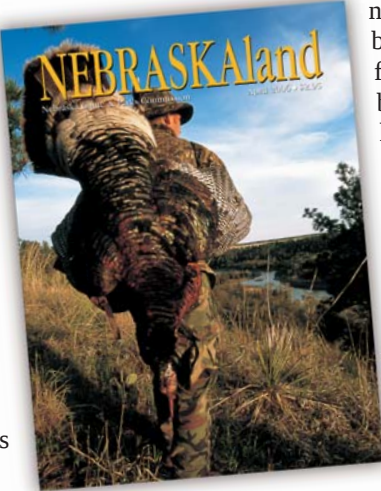
A belted kingfisher poses for a picture on a bridge near Powell.

Cooperative Subject

Enclosed is a picture of a bird that my family and I at first thought was some type of blue-headed woodpecker. As it turns out, it was a belted kingfisher, which we had never seen before. We photographed it last summer on the bridge leading to Powell, Nebraska. He was sitting on the bridge rail looking as if he had had a long flight and needed a rest. When we took the photo, it was as if he knew what we were doing and he turned his head so we could get his face in the picture. We enjoy driving around the country looking for wildlife to photograph. Marvin Wesley Beatrice, Nebraska

April Cover Question

Great magazine!
The April cover left me a little confused, however, given that on page 46 you say that hunters should attach orange tape or fabric to turkeys and turkey decoys while carrying them. Bob Schmidt Schuyler native now living in Jefferson, Iowa



Mr. Schmidt is correct, for safety reasons the successful turkey hunter on the cover probably should have had his tom clearly marked. Thanks for pointing that out and for reading our text so carefully. – Editor

Birds on March Cover

Dear Editors,
First of all, we all enjoy your magazine greatly. It is a wonderful publication.
We have a question concerning the cover of your March 2006 issue.

What are the names of the birds on the front cover? My boss wants to know what they are and has been bugging me ever since the magazine arrived to find out. I have researched your site to find the answers but am unable to identify all of them. Could you please let us know what they are? I would



greatly appreciate it. Keep up the great work.
Virginia M Dunn
Fremont, Nebraska

Pictured starting with the bird at the top of Bud Pritchard's cover art and going clockwise are a Baltimore oriole, Bullock's oriole, red-winged blackbird, common yellowthroat, bobolink and an eastern bluebird. An exhibit of Pritchard's work will remain on display through October at the State Museum in Lincoln for those wishing to see it. – Editor

Comment
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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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NEBRASKA GAME AND PARKS COMMISSION

Zachary Even Wins Habitat Stamp Art Contest

An oil painting of a pronghorn by Zachary Even of Sidney has been chosen as the winner of the 29th annual Nebraska Habitat Stamp Art Contest.

The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission board of commissioners chose Even's painting from 37 entries in the adult division of the contest. Other finalists in the competition were Deb Gengler-Copple of Hubbard, who submitted an acrylic painting of a mountain lion, and Loren Goedeken of Hebron, who entered an oil painting of a pair of trumpeter swans.

Honorable Mention status was awarded to Bruce Becher of Wilber, Blaine Brazier of Lincoln and Julie Crocker of Chapman.

Even's painting of the pronghorn will appear on the 2007 Habitat Stamp, required of most hunters. Money raised from the sale of Habitat Stamps is used to acquire public wildlife lands and to enhance habitat on state and private lands. Even will be asked to appear at the Commission's May meeting to accept a \$300 cash award from the Omaha Fish and Wildlife Club, which helps sponsor the contest. Finalists will receive free subscriptions to NEBRASKALand Magazine.



Zachary Even's painting of a pronghorn will appear on the 2007 Nebraska Habitat Stamp.

Between 60 and 75 people turned out for the first five cleanups.

A free lunch will be served at 1 p.m. at Smith Falls State Park, located 12 miles east and 4 miles south of Valentine.

All participants are asked to complete a registration form and waiver, available online at <http://niobraracouncil.org/page25.htm>, and return it to the Niobrara Council office by May 12. Call (402) 376-2793 for more information.

The third-annual Missouri River Cleanup will be held on the Missouri National Recreational River.

Last year 178 volunteers from across the region and as far away as Omaha helped remove garbage from both the Nebraska and South Dakota banks of the Missouri River upstream and downstream of Yankton. The haul included everything from refrigerators, car bodies and tires to pop bottles, tennis shoes, lawn chairs – even a kitchen sink.

The National Park Service, which oversees management of the recreational river, spearheads the cleanup with help from the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, South

2006 Deer Hunting Seasons

November 11-19, 2006 Firearm Season

Unit	Permits	Either Sex*	2005 Success
Blue Northwest	2,500	100%	59%
Blue Southeast.....	3,500	100%	55%
Buffalo	2,000	100%	60%
Buffalo Whitetail	1,500	100%	51%
Calamus East	1,400	40% ²	44%
Calamus West	1,800	80%	53%
Elkhorn	3,300	100%	56%
Frenchman	2,700	30%	60%
Frenchman Whitetail	800	100%	53%
Keya Paha	2,500	100% ²	47%
Loup East.....	2,600	50% ²	48%
Loup West	1,900	70%	53%
Missouri.....	3,200	100% ²	53%
Pine Ridge	3,000	100% ³	78% ⁵
Plains	1,500	100% ³	96% ⁵
Platte	2,200	20%	57%
Platte Whitetail	800	100%	56%
Republican.....	1,500	100% ²	65%
Republican Whitetail	1,500	100%	63%
Sandhills	2,400	100%	64%
Upper Platte.....	1,200	100%	59%
Wahoo	4,500	100%	58%
Statewide Buck Only.....	7,500	0%	47%

Other Seasons

Muzzleloader 12/1-12/31	Unlimited	100%	30%
Archery 9/15-11/10; 11/20-12/31	Unlimited	100%	29%
Boyer Chute Early 10/7-10/8	40	AO ^{1,3}	90% ⁵
Boyer Chute Late 10/21-10/22	40	AO ^{1,3}	58% ⁵
DeSoto Early 10/14-10/15	140	AO ^{1,3}	123% ⁵
DeSoto Late 10/28-10/29	140	AO ^{1,3}	96% ⁵
DeSoto December 12/9-12/10.....	100	100% ³	74% ⁵
Clear Creek WMA 10/1-10/31	75	AO ^{1,3}	84% ⁵

Season Choice Areas⁴

Area 1	2,000	AO ^{1,3}	73% ⁵
Area 2	1,500	AO ^{1,2}	51%
Area 8	900	AO ^{1,2}	52%
Area 9	800	AO ^{1,2}	50%
Area 13.....	250	AO ^{1,2}	49%
Area 18	2,500	AO ^{1,3}	79% ⁵
Area 19	1,400	AO ¹	49%
Area 20	4,500	AO ¹	46%
Area 21	8,000	AO ^{1,3}	75% ⁵
Area 22	400	AO ^{1,3}	68% ⁵

¹Antlerless deer only (no antlers or both antlers less than 6 inches long).

²Antlerless mule deer prohibited.

³Bonus antlerless deer on all permits.

⁴Season Choice tags are valid during the firearm, muzzleloading and archery seasons, and the antlerless-only season, January 1-15, 2007.

⁵Bonus tags raised success percentage.

* Percent of permits that are either sex. Permits that are not either sex are buck only.

For more information on the state's big game seasons, see the 2006 Nebraska Big Game Guide, or go online at www.outdoornebraska.org.

Dakota Game Fish and Parks Department, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the city of Yankton.

The cleanup runs from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. and begins at Yankton's Riverside Park. Coffee, doughnuts and lunch will be provided. Organizations, service clubs, scout troops, families and individuals are invited. Volunteers will receive a hat or T-shirt for participating.

For more information, contact George Berndt with the Park Service at (402) 667-2550.

Commissioners set 2006 Big Game Seasons

An increase in the number and price of Statewide Buck firearm deer permits, nearly across the board cuts in the number of pronghorn permits issued and relaxed restrictions on elk permits highlight the changes made to big game seasons set in March by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission board of commissioners.

The price of Statewide Buck firearm deer permits was raised from \$26 to \$68.50 for residents and from \$176 to \$443.50 for nonresidents. Residents have had the first chance at these permits in recent years and took all of them in the initial drawing. This year, the increased price is expected to decrease demand among residents, and with the approval of 7,500 permits for this fall's hunting season, 2,500 more than were issued in 2005, some are expected to be available to out-of-state hunters.

Overall, the Commission approved 55,800 permits for the November firearm season, 2,700 more than last year. Another 22,250 Season Choice permits, which allow hunters to harvest antlerless deer during archery, firearm or muzzleloader seasons, were approved. That was 700 more than last year. To help increase the harvest of antlerless deer and control whitetail numbers, the Commission also reduced the price of Season Choice antlerless

permits for nonresidents from \$176 to \$55.

Including firearm, archery, muzzleloader and landowner permits, hunters purchased 118,369 permits in 2005, the second highest total on record. The total deer harvest was 60,816, the highest on record.

Declines in the number of pronghorns in some areas, declines in hunter success and hunter surveys that showed most people want the chance to harvest mature bucks led the Commission to reduce the number of firearm pronghorn permits issued in all but the Dismal, Cherry and Garden management units. The biggest cut was in the North Sioux Unit, where just 90 permits were issued, half of the number issued in 2005. In all, 380 permits were approved, compared to 542 in 2005.

Also, muzzleloader pronghorn permits will no longer be valid statewide. Instead, 35 permits will be issued for the North Sioux Muzzleloader Unit, which includes northwestern Nebraska, and another 65 permits for the Prairie Muzzleloader unit, which includes the rest of the state. That's 50 fewer muzzleloader permits than were issued in 2005.

Nebraskans who were lucky enough in the past to draw a coveted once-in-a-lifetime elk permit can now apply for antlerless elk permits. Demand has been low for antlerless permits: Of the 1,071 hunters who applied for permits in 2005, only 334 said they would accept an antlerless permit. That number should increase considerably this year following a regulation change by the Commission that allows hunters to draw an antlerless elk permit every three years. Hunters can still draw only one either-sex permit in their lifetime.

The Commission approved 42 either-sex elk permits for the state's six management units, three more than last year. Another 147 antlerless elk permits are available, an increase of 39. One-third of all permits are reserved for eligible landowners.

While more permits are being issued, the number is intended to help elk herds continue to grow in the state.



Brett Cooper's winning duck stamp art.

Cooper Wins Junior Duck Stamp Contest Again

An acrylic painting of a pair of canvasbacks by Brett Cooper of Harrisburg recently placed second in the 2006 Federal Junior Duck Stamp Contest.

Cooper's artwork advanced to the national contest after being chosen as Best of Show from more than 750 entries at the state level. It was the fourth time Cooper, a 17-year-old student at Banner County High School, won the Nebraska contest. The first came in 1998 when he was 9 years old. He won again in 2003 and 2005.

Cooper's artwork will appear on the 2007 Nebraska Waterfowl Stamp, as it did in 2006, the first year the stamp was issued. Proceeds from the sale of \$5 Nebraska Waterfowl Stamps, required by most duck and goose hunters, are used to purchase and restore wetland habitat in Nebraska and Canada to benefit migratory birds and hunters.

Cooper earned \$3,000 for his second-place finish in the national contest, where he garnered honorable mention last year. The winning entry will appear on the 2006-2007 Federal Junior Duck Stamp.

A traveling exhibit of the top 36 Nebraska entries will be displayed May 1-5 at the Falls City High School; May 15-19 in Lincoln's Main Post Office; May 29 - June 2,

Game and Parks Commission, Omaha; June 12-16, Cabela's, Kearney; June 26-30, Game and Parks Commission, Norfolk; July 10-14, Ft. Niobrara National Wildlife Refuge, Valentine; July 17 - August 1, Cabela's, Sidney; August 7-18, Bassett Art Council; August 28, McCook Art Guild.

Youth Outdoor Skills Camps

The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission and Nebraska 4-H have scheduled two Youth Outdoor Skills Camps this summer for youngsters interested in learning about traditional outdoor pursuits.

Nebraska youth ages 11 to 14 years will get hands-on lessons in shooting small-caliber rifles, shotguns, muzzleloaders and archery equipment, fishing, camping, canoeing and backpacking from outdoor professionals and volunteers, all experts in the field.

"For many, the camps represent the first time a youth has broken clays, shot arrows at 3D targets, witnessed the white smoke and bellow of a muzzleloading rifle or just caught fish with other kids having similar interests," said Jeff Rawlinson, outdoor education specialist with the Commission. "The camps are fun, involved and the kids learn by doing."

The first camp will be June 19-22 near Halsey at the State 4-H Camp in the Bessey Ranger District of the Nebraska National Forest. The cost is \$222 and students must register by June 12.

The second camp will be July 10-14 at the Eastern Nebraska 4-H Camp near Gretna. The cost is \$288 and students must register by July 3.

Campers are encouraged to register early as the camps generally fill by late-May. To download an application form for either camp, go to the Commission's web site at www.ngpc.state.ne.us/hunting/programs/education/youth.asp. For more information, contact Jeff Rawlinson at (402) 471-6133 or jeff.rawlinson@ngpc.ne.gov. ■

Quail Organization Formed

New grassroots group hopes to improve habitat conditions for quail.

By Jon Farrar

Nebraska is on the northwestern edge of the bobwhite quail's range and their abundance here rises and falls according to two variables – the frequency of severe winter weather and the availability of quality habitat.

In the early to mid-1900s, small farms and their accompanying fencerows in Nebraska provided all the cover a quail could ever need. As agriculture grew evermore intense in the 1970s, though, bobwhite habitat in many areas began to fall below the threshold needed to sustain coveys.

In November 2005, quail hunters gathered in Lancaster County to form the state's first Quail Forever chapter only a few months after the national organization was founded as an offshoot of Pheasants Forever. A second chapter has since organized in Franklin County, a third in Frontier and Gosper counties and more are expected wherever there is support.

As with Pheasants Forever, Quail Forever chapters will decide where and how locally raised conservation funds are used. Most of the money will probably be spent fairly close to the chapter home, said Keith Brus, regional wildlife biologist for Quail Forever, but the organization will not turn down a good project anywhere in the state and will benefit from lessons its sister organization has learned.

"Pheasants Forever knows the best ways to stretch habitat dollars is by partnering with as many organizations and agencies as possible," he said.

One of the quickest and most efficient ways to improve quail habitat is by modifying existing habitat programs, Brus said. The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), a federal farm program, is a good example. While bobwhites and pheasants use some of the same habitat, quail have specific habitat requirements. Quail require about



Quail Forever is trying to increase the bobwhite quail population in Nebraska.

50-percent bare ground and prosper even more than pheasants in early succession habitat, the type found in CRP fields three or four years after they are established. Inter-seeding old CRP fields with legumes and other forbs improves habitat for both pheasants and quail.

One of the most promising existing federal farm programs to improve quail habitat is Habitat Buffers for Upland Birds, commonly called the quail buffer program. Quail Forever chapters will be particularly active in trying to get landowners to participate in that program, Brus said.

"The difference between regular CRP and the buffer program is that it's continuous sign-up and landowners can enroll year-round," Brus explained. "Under the CRP program, landowners receive a \$100 per acre one-time bonus payment, essentially a 90-percent cost share, and a rental payment for enrolling in the 10-year program. Under the buffers program, strips of habitat ranging from 30-feet wide up to

120-feet wide are established on field margins. In addition to providing excellent habitat, the strips are erosion control buffers."

Habitat buffers can be planted with an assortment of wildlife-friendly plants. Quail, pheasants and an array of nongame birds benefit most from mixtures heavy on forbs and legumes that maintain buffers in an early succession stage. Grass is an important component but should not be allowed to dominate and crowd out other desirable wildlife plant species. The buffer program also has a shrub component.

"If there isn't already a plum thicket in the fence line," Brus explained, "the program will help landowners plant them."

Cost sharing for establishing woody plants is available under the current farm program and trees and shrubs are available at reasonable prices from local natural resources district offices. "One of the most significant ways Quail Forever can partner with the federal buffer program is public outreach and education – letting landowners know what programs are available, Brus said.

"Our committee members aren't just raising money for habitat projects," Brus said. "They know the landowners and often are able to sell those programs a lot better than someone who doesn't. The goal of Quail Forever is to provide the best possible quail habitat we can get on the ground."

If interested in joining or organizing a Quail Forever chapter, contact Keith Brus at 2178 Brady Road, Wolbach, NE 68882, 308-754-4815, Keith@NebraskaPF.com. For more information on Quail Forever, check their national website at www.quail-forever.org or the Nebraska website at www.NebraskaPF.com. ■

Merritt Reservoir Mystery

Photos and text by Ken Bouc

A group of intrepid fishermen on their annual trip to Merritt Reservoir found that the fish had abandoned their previous patterns. No problem, they just experimented, adapted and fished for what was biting.

Tim Schuckman and his son, Ben, were fishing for northern pike along a shoreline in Merritt Reservoir's Powderhorn area when something big slammed Tim's lure. He knew instantly that this fish was special.

"Most northerns really take off when hooked, but this thing stopped dead, like it was just daring me to do something," Tim recounted later. "I was able to bring him up for just an instant and saw a flash of white, so I thought it was a big walleye, and he made a couple of runs that kept me thinking

'big walleye' when he stayed deep the whole time," he said.

When Tim finally dragged the fish into view, however, more than a yard of muskellunge swam past the boat and he began to worry. He knew he was asking an awful lot of eight-pound-test line. Tim lost a big muskie on light line at Merritt 15 years before, didn't like it much, and wasn't anxious to repeat the experience.

Ben made a move with the landing net, but the muskie was too far out and took off on another run. On his next attempt, however, Ben was able to



Tim Schuckman tries to revive his big muskie, the largest fish of the trip.



Seth (left) and Dann Scofield cast spinnerbaits near Merritt Reservoir's "bird trees." Trial and error that morning showed yellow spinnerbaits were hot, a pattern that lasted the rest of the trip.

corral the fish.

Dann and Seth Scofield, the other members of the fishing party, pulled into the bay just in time to see Tim, kneeling on the front deck of his boat, flip a yellow spinnerbait from his pliers and lift the front half of a big, golden fish just high enough for them to see. Then he reached for a measuring board.

Tim was anxious to see if the fish made the magic 40-inch mark, the legal minimum for keeping a muskie and a personal goal he had set for himself long ago. Whether the fish "measured up" or not, Tim already knew it would be the highlight, perhaps even the

turning point, of a trip marked by poor fishing at the start and feast or famine since.

Tim, chief financial officer of Jennie Melham Memorial Medical Center in Broken Bow, and Dann, who owns and operates a construction company in that community, have been fishing sidekicks ever since their sons became friends in school and on youth baseball teams. Seth now attends the University of Nebraska – Lincoln, and Ben is a student at Chadron State College.

The foursome had fished Merritt Reservoir this same weekend for the past five years, each time catching

walleye from the same weedbeds on jigs sweetened with a bit of crawler – that is, when they weren't lifting crappie aboard on smaller jigs minus the crawler. The 2005 edition started the Wednesday before Free Fishing and Parks Day in Nebraska, which is always the Saturday prior to the Memorial Day weekend.

This trip, however, didn't shape up like their previous outings. There were no crappie of any size to be had in any of their normal haunts, and the upper Snake River area of the lake – the walleye honey-hole of previous years – could have easily passed for the Dead



Merritt Reservoir State Recreation Area is located 26 miles southwest of Valentine on Nebraska Highway 97. The 2,900-acre lake has 44 miles of shoreline. Samuel R. McKelvie National Forest is north of the lake.



Tim measures one of the trip's first northerns. Pike caught during the trip were consistently in the five- to six-pound range.

Sea. Tim was concerned. A front had moved through with a 30-mile-per-hour north wind the day before, and he knew that kind of weather could make fishing on Merritt tough for several days.

The lack of crappie and walleye that first afternoon and evening might have defeated some anglers, but not this bunch. “We like catching all kinds of fish. We just adapt to the conditions and keep on fishing. We’ll fish for whatever fish are biting,” Dann said.

Thursday morning found the party’s two boats back on the Snake River area. Dann and Seth probed the water east of the “bird trees” (as the area is known where cormorants roosted in flooded trees before the trees rotted away) while Tim and Ben fished across the narrow arm of the lake along the north bank. They opened with their usual jig-and-crawler combinations just in case the fish had changed their minds about those rigs overnight. They hadn’t. By 10 a.m., the fishermen were looking in their tackle boxes for options.

Tim made his choice quickly. With northern pike in mind, he grabbed a

spinnerbait in his favorite color – black, while Ben picked a chartreuse one to give the fish another choice.

A glance toward the Scofields a quarter-mile away showed they had the same idea, as glistening hardware carried line from their boat in long, shimmering arcs. Seth was probably wearing a great big grin.

“The best part of the trip is when you get out the big poles and start chucking spinnerbaits,” he announced at the campfire later that night. “I like a little finesse fishing, using the small jigs and things like that for walleye, but there’s nothing quite like tossing a spinnerbait out there and having a huge northern just rip out line ... that’s pretty much the best part of the trip for me right there.”

After a few casts, Tim began noticing something as he brought his lure near the boat. “Did you see that? Those fish following the spinnerbait?” he asked. They were there on his next cast, and on Ben’s, too – as many as a half-dozen six-inch-long, silvery-green fish. They were alewife, the main course on the menu of walleye, northerns, muskies

and other big predators in the lake

Tim regarded the alewife as a good omen. It was the first time they had seen these baitfish in all their trips to Merritt, and it appeared that they were shallow today. Perhaps the alewives were a clue that could help them cope with the tough fishing they were finding. In any event, having baitfish around is almost always a good sign because game fish are usually nearby.

Tim soon caught a couple of nice northerns with his black spinnerbait, and Ben took one crowding six pounds, as well as a largemouth of about 15 inches. In all, they boated six or seven northerns in that spot. Several other pike, including a couple of lunkers, bit through the line in spite of steel leaders or showed their ornery nature in other ways. One made a U-turn around a snag, then swam back up the line to make the cut several feet above the steel. Another nearly jumped into the boat trying to eat a spinnerbait being lifted out of the water. As Tim had speculated, the fish were near the surface with the alewife and they were active.

The Schuckmans eventually joined the Scofields just before noon to see how they were doing. Dann and Seth were also throwing spinnerbaits, having also noticed the alewife following their lures, but they’d settled on yellow as the best color. It was not a trendy pale yellow or chartreuse, but the down-to-earth yellow you see on PENNZOIL cans or Kodak film boxes. In Dixie, it’s called “yaller.”

Dann and Seth had each taken a nice walleye and a couple of northerns, and Dann had a pike bite the blade clean off a brand-new spinnerbait. But their technique was different. They retrieved the lure just off the bottom and just fast enough to keep the blade spinning or fluttering from side to side, a technique sometimes called “slow-rolling.”

As the sun climbed higher, slow-rolling yellow spinnerbaits continued to work while shallow presentations and black spinnerbaits lost their magic.

“You know, it wasn’t too bad a morning, not when you consider yesterday’s big front. When you think about the fish we landed and the fish we had on, it wasn’t bad at all,” Tim mused as he contemplated a late lunch back at their camp on Merritt’s Boardman area. “I know that alewife following spinnerbaits is part of a pattern at other lakes, like at Elwood for walleye fishing, but this is the first time we’ve seen alewife here at all, let alone following spinnerbaits. We know the alewife are shallow, we caught walleye shallow and the northern are there too. I don’t know if this is common here this time of year and we just haven’t noticed it before, but I’m encouraged by it.”

The morning’s fishing might have hinted at a turnaround in their fortunes, but Tim’s optimism was not entirely justified. Dann and Seth experienced reasonable success in new water that afternoon, finding the islands, bays and points of the Powderhorn area ideal for spinnerbaits.

“We went in there firing spinnerbaits, running them shallow and throwing to weedbeds for northerns,” Dann said. And they found them, including a 34-inch pike that Seth caught, the biggest of six northerns. They also found walleye measuring 21 and 23 inches and a 20-inch largemouth. Alewife were there, too.

The Schuckmans’ big crappie hunt in

the Boardman, however, flopped when the wind died and the game fish went deep. Carp, big ones and lots of them, provided the only action, thanks to Ben’s bow and arrow. Tim and Ben spent the last two hours of daylight back on the Snake arm with Dann and Seth, but eight man-hours of effort yielded just one rather ordinary walleye.

It was after 10:30, with the evening’s cooking, eating and camp chores done, when Ben settled into a comfortable bag chair near the fire. “The best part about coming out here and fishing at Merritt is just being able to sit around the campfire at night,” he said. “What a great spot to just sit by the lake, have a pole or two in the water, catch fish, tell stories, watch the campfire and” The rest of the party gathered around the fire and brought him back to reality.

“It’s sure not the water temperature or weed growth that’s changed the fishing – they’re both about the same as other years,” Tim said. “Not that it matters. We’ve done ok some places – struck out others.” After a minute’s silence, broken only by the pop and hiss of the fire, he continued:

“On the Snake, starting on the south bank east of the bird trees, we’ve found walleye and northerns, and always found them around alewife. When we clean the ones we keep, there’s alewife in their bellies. It was pretty obvious when we first saw them – the key on this trip will be the alewife.”

Dann agreed. “We haven’t caught any fish to speak of where we haven’t seen alewife, so they are crucial, alright,” he said. “We’ll just search for alewife with our spinnerbaits, and do our fishing where we find them.”

Friday morning began with another trip up the Snake. Tim and Ben soon

left to “hunt for fish” while Dann and Seth lingered near their favored bird trees. They eventually found a couple of walleye with their yellow spinnerbaits, then worked their way east and caught another along a sand bank. Tim and Ben returned and reported no action except for more carp bowfishing. They fished their way back to camp for lunch, but only the archery equipment saw action.

At lunch, the anglers took stock. There was nothing happening from the bird trees west or in the Boardman. If alewife and shallow habitats were the key, the Powderhorn would be the logical place



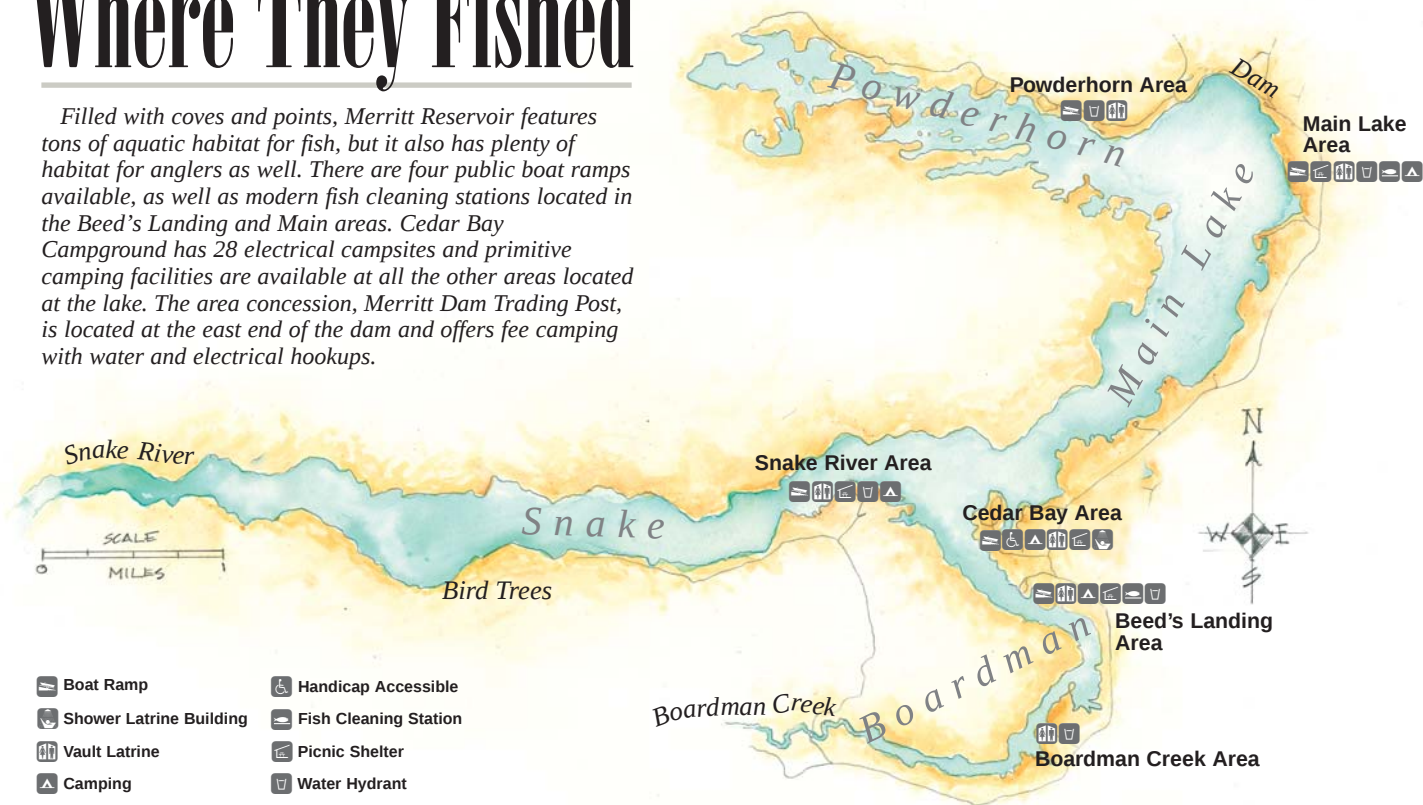
Ben holds up what was probably the trip's biggest crappie. Mainstays of previous years, nice-sized crappies were hard to come by on this outing.

to fish. Ben and Seth decided to take an afternoon snooze, so Tim tossed his gear into Dann’s boat and they headed down the lake.

The bays and points of the Powderhorn area offered neither baitfish nor game fish in the shallow brush piles or edges of the shoreline weedbeds. Eventually, a long, random cast to the center of the bay, only made to

Where They Fished

Filled with coves and points, Merritt Reservoir features tons of aquatic habitat for fish, but it also has plenty of habitat for anglers as well. There are four public boat ramps available, as well as modern fish cleaning stations located in the Beed's Landing and Main areas. Cedar Bay Campground has 28 electrical campsites and primitive camping facilities are available at all the other areas located at the lake. The area concession, Merritt Dam Trading Post, is located at the east end of the dam and offers fee camping with water and electrical hookups.



reorganize a reel's untidy spool of line, accidentally produced a strike and an important clue.

The fish were in deeper water, apparently finding refuge from the summer-like temperature and glaring sun. "Everything was deeper, in the tops of the weeds about eight feet down out in the middle of the bays. If you got your spinnerbait out there and down to the weeds, you'd have alewife follow it to the boat or you'd get a strike. If your lure ran too shallow, nothing would happen," Dann said.

According to accepted angling lore, spawning alewife are attracted to spinnerbaits, and alewife around the lure attract hungry northerns and walleyes. When the game fish attacks,

the alewife scatter and leave the spinnerbait as the only

target for the fish to strike.

That bay yielded four walleye, several feisty pike and a muskellunge that Dann caught slow-rolling his yellow spinnerbait just above submerged weeds. It came to the landing net coughing up the alewife it had for lunch.

At 30 inches, it was a nice fish but well short of the 40-inch minimum. After admiring it for a moment, Dann slipped it back into the waters of "muskie bay," as that spot was to be called the rest of the trip. "I can't believe this. It's 90 degrees and the sun is high, there's not a cloud in the sky and we're catching walleye and northerns and muskies in the middle of the afternoon," Tim chuckled.

As the sun dipped lower, Dann fired up his outboard and he and Tim headed back to camp to fetch Ben, Seth and a sandwich or two to tide them over until their 10 p.m. supper. Soon everyone was on their way back to the Powderhorn. Tim and Ben pulled into "muskie bay" while Dann and Seth motored to another cove nearby. There Dann caught a pair of 28-inch northerns and a couple of largemouth bass, all on a yellow spinnerbait.

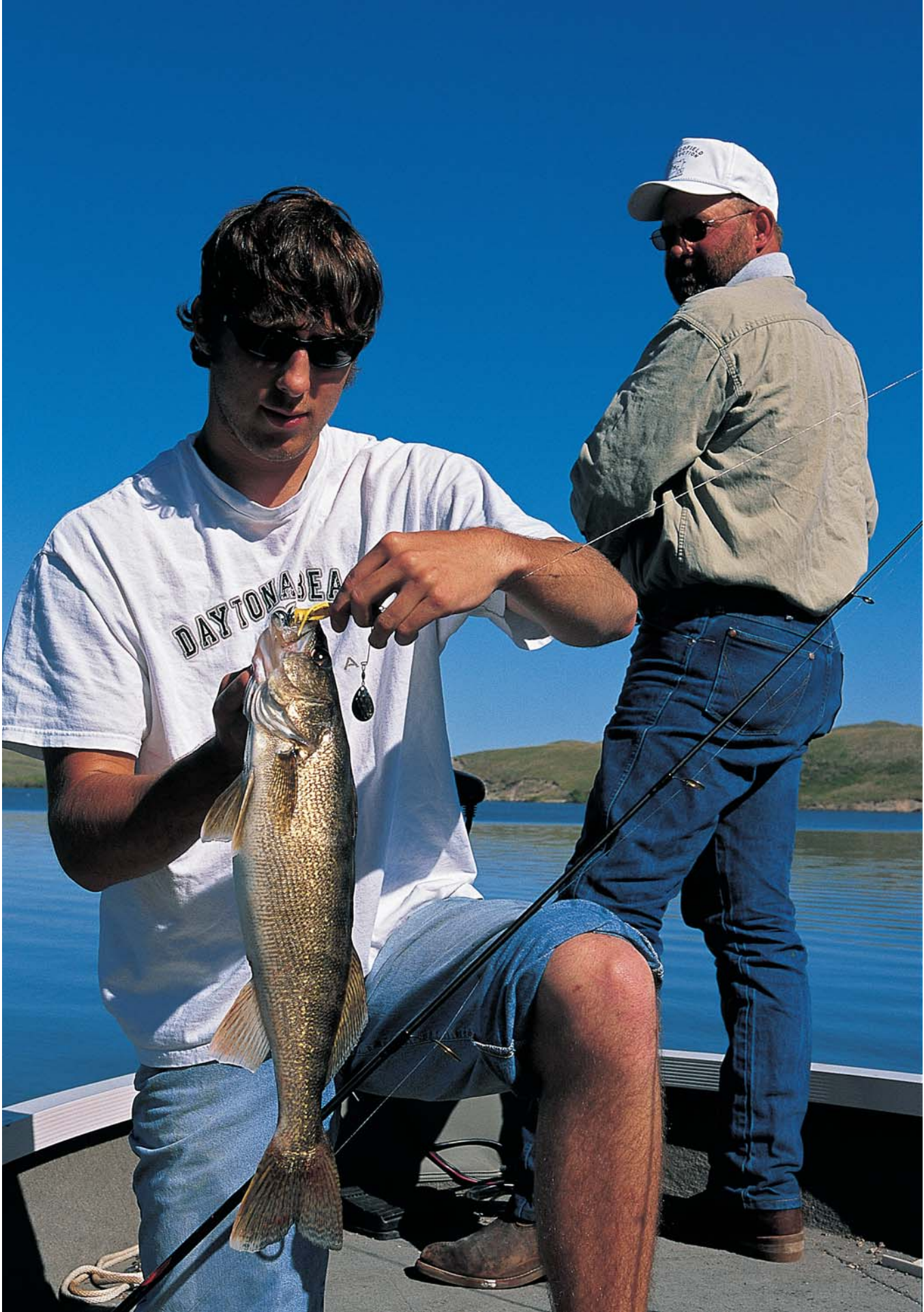
Then the radio squawked the news of Tim's big fish: "Better come on over. I've got a muskie on — a real nice one."

Dann and Seth wasted no time, pulling into the bay just seconds after Ben landed the big fish. They watched Tim slip the muskie on the measuring board, study it for a moment, then reposition the fish for another look.

"Short," Tim finally said. "No matter how you look at it, he's 39 and a half — a half-inch short." Tim quickly weighed the fish at just under 15 pounds, then said "Let's get him back in the lake."

But the muskie was exhausted, and releasing him with any chance of survival wouldn't prove easy. Tim first cradled the fish in the water at the side of the boat until it attempted to swim, but it could manage only a few feeble strokes of its big tail before listing to one side and turning belly up.

Tim then tried jump-starting the fish by moving it back and forth a few times to force water across its gills before remembering the admonition of his brother, Jeff, a fisheries biologist. Gills were not designed to handle water moving from back to front, and the back-and-forth motion probably does



With his father Dann watching, Seth unhooks a chunky walleye, one of many that fell for yellow spinnerbaits during the trip.



The group's campsite overlooking the lake provided a comfortable setting to do evening chores and reflect on the day's fishing.

more harm than good. So Tim got down on his belly on the front deck of the boat and held the fish in the water while Ben used the electric motor to propel the craft slowly along. After several repetitions, the muskie seemed to manage a few more strokes after release, but still faltered. Finally, Dann asked to try his hand at muskie resuscitation. Dann and Seth used their boat and its electric motor in the same way Tim and Ben had used theirs, but when Dann released the muskie, he held the fish ahead of the tail and gently pushed it almost straight down as far as he could reach. Several slow strokes of the fish's big tail took it down and out of sight. There was no way of knowing how well their efforts had worked. "I thought

the surface water might be too warm and short of oxygen, or maybe too bright and confusing for the fish. I figured getting him down to cooler and friendlier surroundings might be what he needed," Dann later explained. The boats separated a bit and everyone spent the next 10 or 15 minutes watching the quiet surface of the immediate area without seeing any more of the big fish. That night in camp, Tim reflected on the day's fishing. "Conditions were tough today – hot and bright without a cloud in the sky. I didn't see another boat catch a fish, and the boats I talked to hadn't caught anything all day. I think we did really well. We caught northern, we caught walleye, and then that muskie at the end. I think we turned things around today," he said.

Events would prove Tim right. The skunking he and Ben endured that morning (shooting carp doesn't count) would be the last "famine" anyone in the party would experience. It would be "feast" the rest of the trip, beginning with Tim and Dann's Friday afternoon in the Powderhorn, then the evening outing that ended with Tim's big muskie. The group took the next morning off but made up for it after lunch. Ben and Tim tried jig-and-crawler rigs again and caught two nice walleye on the lower Snake area before running out of bait. Ben then switched to a crankbait and nailed a nice walleye on his fourth or fifth cast. Crankbaits quickly accounted for two more walleye, plus six hefty white bass. Meanwhile, Dann and Seth tapped their favorite area near

the bird trees for four walleye and a couple of northern, again on yellow spinnerbaits. For the trip's final effort on Sunday morning, Tim fished with jigs and a fresh supply of crawlers where they had found walleye the day before. He found, instead, another muskie, this one two inches shorter but chunkier and probably a little heavier than Friday evening's fish. He hooked it using a 1/8-ounce jig on a five-foot-long ultralight rod and six-pound test line, so he spent the rest of the morning landing the fish. The Scofields and Schuckmans left for home with a thoroughly enjoyable outing under their belts. Tim and Dann estimated they caught about 25 walleye and nearly twice as many northern pike

during the trip, most of them coming after noon on Friday. Five- and six-pound northern were common, and one pike was easily in the 10-pound class. Many of the walleyes measured 21 to 23 inches and were "fat as footballs," according to Tim. Three muskies were also caught, the first of their kind in five years. They also caught approximately six largemouth and six smallmouth bass, 20 mostly small crappie, about 10 very large white bass, plus one or two bluegill, channel catfish and yellow perch – a total of 10 species on hook and line. All but the bluegill, catfish and perch struck yellow spinnerbaits. "We enjoy eating some fish, so we often keep a few selected species, mainly

crappie, walleye, and an occasional northern. We release the rest," Tim said. But the trip wasn't all about one or two big fish or lots of nice fish. It was about meeting a challenge, recognizing a problem, thinking it through and solving it, according to Dann. "It's nice when you find a good fishing scenario that works year after year, like we had going. But maybe it's ok when the fish throw you a curve once in a while. They make you observe and think and experiment, and when you solve the puzzle, it makes the fishing that much more satisfying," Tim said. "But it doesn't hurt to be a little lucky, too, and I think we were lucky to find the yellow spinnerbait angle." ■

What They Caught

Walleye

Crappie

Muskellunge

Smallmouth Bass

Northern Pike

Bluegill

White bass

Yellow Perch

Largemouth bass

Channel catfish

The Best Morel Hunter

By Jon Farrar

Finding a “herd” of mushrooms is easier than keeping its location secret. Here are some tips from a pro on the stealth required to be the best mushroom hunter in town.

All you old tick-infested, snake-bit veteran morel hunters know the basics of successful mushroom quests – wait until the oak leaves are the size of a squirrel’s ear or the lilacs are blooming on the first warm day after a spring shower in early May, don’t soak your treasures in water and turn them to mush, et cetera, et cetera. What follows is the rest of what you need to know, if you don’t already, and some philosophical meanderings on how to be the best morel hunter in your town.

First, resist at all costs the urge to show your bushel basket of mushrooms to everyone you can waylay on the street. I know that’s a tall order. Instead, take a few photos of yourself posing modestly with your catch and casually push them across the coffee shop table in about July. Explain that your wife just finished the roll of film or you would have brought them in sooner. If asked where you found them, say something like: “Gee, was that down on Shank Mortimer’s piece of river or the Utterbach place? Might have been up in the oak draws on the Slat Davis farm. Been so long ago I’m just not sure any more.” When choosing places to mention, only name mushroom grounds already well known to local morel hunters.

When asked during the season how mushroom hunting is, always reply the

“ticks sure are thick this year,” and “I read in the newspaper that Lyme disease is rampant.” If the questioner persists, toss in that you think a mountain lion stalked you last time out, and that “the game commission has been stocking ‘em, you know, putting little radio transmitters in ‘em so they know where each and every one is at every minute of every day.” Some folks seem to swallow that whopper without blinking.

When beginning a morel foray, never drive yourself, even if you can pull your rig back in the woods where it won’t be seen. You just never know who will come along as you’re opening the gate off the county road. Have your wife, or better still, someone you trust, drop you off. Keep your head down when you leave town. In fact, keep it down all the way to where you’re going. Drive right on by where you plan to get off at least twice to be sure there is no one coming from either direction. On the last pass have your driver slow down enough that you can roll out into the ditch. Check both ways down the road, look for broken bottles and rolls of barbed wire hidden in the brome grass, then slither off into the brush as quickly as possible.

If you’ve been swept up by the high-tech craze in outdoor recreation, never GPS a mushroom hotspot. For those of you who have not been seduced by technology, GPS means Global

Positioning System, the little hand-held electronic compass gizmos that tell you you’re about to step off a steep bank and fall in the river because you’re looking at the dinky little screen instead of where you’re going. The National Security Agency (NSA) monitors all GPS markers – honest, it’s part of the Homeland Security Program – and within NSA are a slew of morel hunters, some Middle Eastern spies even, looking for new and better mushroom grounds.

Instead, sketch out a little map on a piece of paper torn from a grocery bag. Use pencil. It won’t bleed like ink if the map gets wet. Don’t be too detailed, just enough to get you back to the same place the next spring, like “24 paces more-or-less north-by-northwest of the fallen cottonwood” and use obscure locations known only to yourself, like “at the end of the diamond willow patch where I shot the five-point buck on opening morning in 1974.” Stash the map somewhere safe. I keep mine under the Dr. Scholl’s arch insert in the pair of hiking boots I haven’t worn for 20 years. If you can’t resist using your new-fangled GPS unit, label the site something that will attract little attention, like “Dead Cow.”

Morel mushroom decoys, the sort you sometimes see sold at sports shows, don’t work. Neither do morel calls. Morels are rather old-fashioned and discreet in their asexual adventures. The mating call of the wild morel is reported to be a soft *piff, piff, piff*, as when gazillions of spores are being squirted into the atmosphere. And morel herds (that’s what morel colonies are called) may require decades to advance more than a few feet, so even if they did respond to calls or decoys they’d be decoying to your long-decomposed body. Stalking is the only successful morel hunting technique and is almost always successful since morels have a poor sense of smell and rumors regarding the fungi’s advanced sense of hearing and ability to feel approaching footsteps and seek cover under woodland duff are probably likewise unfounded.

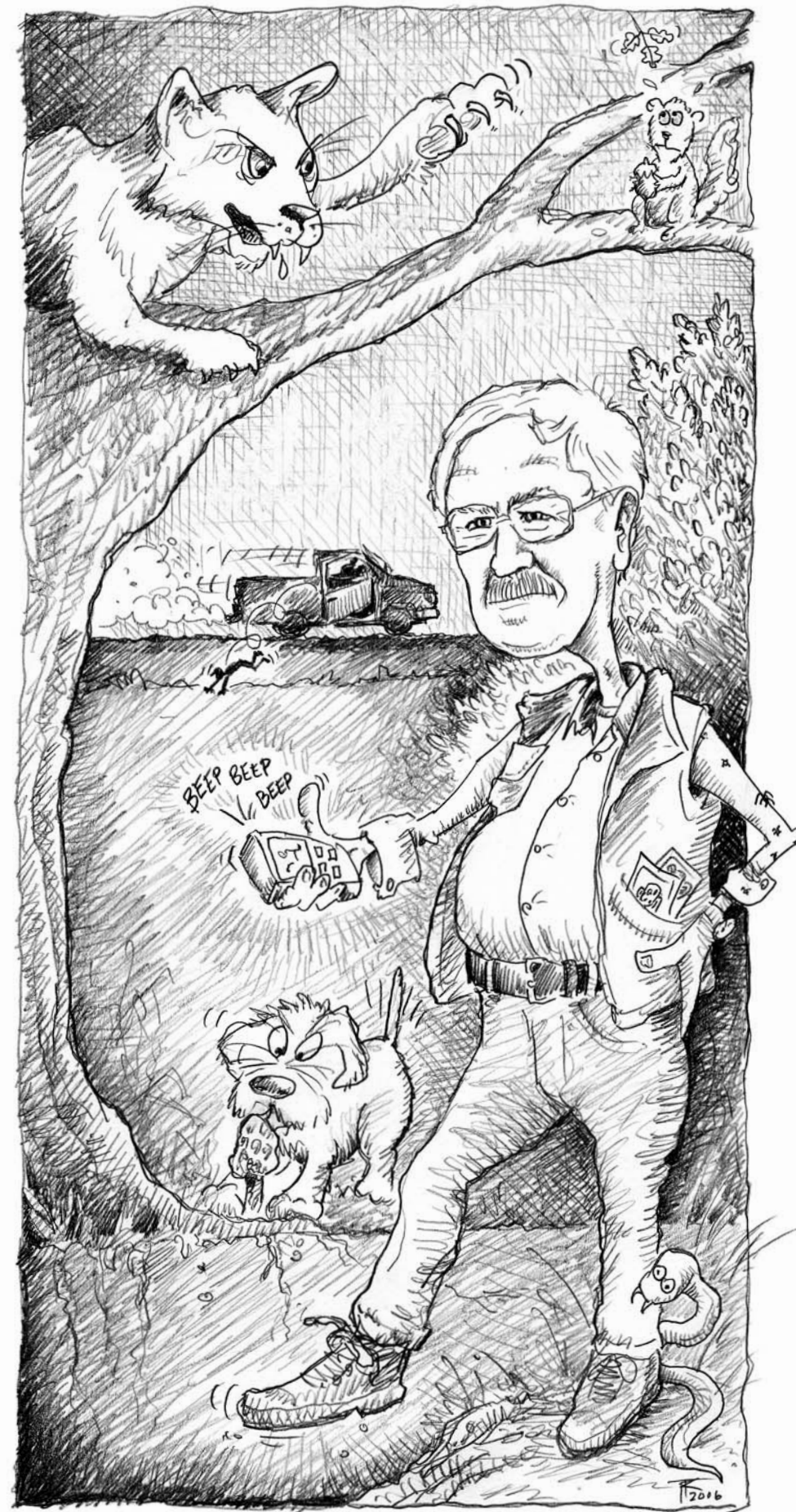
Now, at the beginning of this screed I promised some thoughts on how to rise to the next highest level of morel location efficiency, but this is still more in the theoretical realm, something

spawned during a toddy-after-the-hunt moment. Woe is me to write what follows, but I think us American fungi hunters are centuries behind the French. In France the big fungi has always been the truffle – a warty, irregularly shaped morsel that grows as large as a clenched fist. They are the most expensive wild food in the world, commanding as much as \$500 per pound. The fruiting body of the truffle grows from a few inches to a few feet underground, so they are elusive tidbits of haute cuisine.

French truffle hunters employ both mix-breed dogs and pigs to locate the buried treasures. Female pigs are reported to be the best choice, as the musky scent of the ripe truffle is apparently much like the scent of a virile and attractive boar. Perhaps for that reason the truffle has always been considered something of an aphrodisiac. The advantage of using dogs to locate buried truffles is that they are less adept at quickly extracting and devouring the quarry than are aroused sows. They’re also less possessive of their finds. It’s reported that many veteran truffle hunters in southwestern France are missing fingers from disagreements with sows over truffle ownership rights. Dogs are more easily bought off with a scrap of bread or biscuit.

I don’t have pigs at the moment, but I do have a wire-haired pointer who excels at locating slices of pepperoni that fall off pizzas and roll under furniture. Seeing how he also has a special fondness for fermented cucumbers and zucchini squash – a ripe, musky smell not unlike the essence of decay which many morel hunters claim wafts from a good mushroom bed – I think he has the potential to be a world-class morel hunter. He’s adept at digging his own potatoes in the garden, too, and so should be able to find and uncover morels not yet pushed through heavy leaf litter. If a mongrel French dog can find underground fungi, considering France’s greatest contribution to the canine world is the poodle, then surely my German dog, from a country that has produced so many outstanding breeds, can find a dang mushroom above ground.

I wouldn’t expect a staunch point. A happy tail would be adequate. ■



Fishing Across Nebraska

A Guide to Public Fishing Lakes in the I-80 Corridor

By Rick Eades, Urban Fisheries Specialist



JON FARRAR

The I-80 Lakes System

It's 455 miles across Nebraska on Interstate 80 – about seven hours if you obey the speed limit and don't make any stops. But that's a long time to sit in a car, so you might want to stop to stretch your legs, let the kids play for a while and get something to eat. Or, you might want to do some fishing.

If the latter is for you, there are plenty of opportunities to wet a line along Interstate 80 (I-80). Dozens of lakes are within casting distance or a few minutes drive of the interstate. In central Nebraska, they seem to be at every exit. Most of those waters, and many others, are yours to fish, and they are the reason for this guide.

The lakes are perfect places for weary cross-country travelers to stop and fish for a while. You may not even need your own fishing tackle – it can be borrowed, free of charge, at several state parks and recreation areas along the way.

The lakes are no secret to many Nebraskans – those making short trips across the state sometimes pack their rod and reel and a lunch, hoping to get a bite or two while having one. Also, the thousands of anglers who live in the many towns along I-80 have found that the freeway makes it easy for them to hop from one lake to another in search of the hot bite, and they can often be fishing only minutes after leaving home or work.

Nebraska offers fishing permits for one day, three days or all year, so it doesn't cost travelers much to stop and fish for a few hours. Children less than 16 years old can fish for free, including nonresidents accompanied by an adult with a Nebraska permit. Permits can be purchased on the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission web site at www.outdoornebraska.org, from Commission offices and at many tackle shops and stores that sell fishing equipment.

All of the lakes listed in this guide have fishing regulations governing the number and/or sizes of fish that may be kept. Some may also restrict the use of live bait or allow only catch and release fishing. Boating regulations also vary from lake to lake. On most

smaller waters, speed is restricted to 5 mph, no wake. Other waters allow only electric motors.

Regulations can change from year to year, so you should pick up a copy of the current Nebraska Fishing Guide and Nebraska Boating Guide before hitting the water. They are available at Commission offices and wherever fishing permits are sold. Guides are also available on the Commission's web site.

Types of Lakes

Most lakes along I-80 are borrow pits, especially from North Platte to Grand Island where the interstate runs parallel to the Platte River.

When I-80 was built, the easiest and cheapest route was the flat, wide-open Platte River Valley. Building the highway along the river was a challenge because of high groundwater levels and because there were no hills to provide fill material. Wherever road builders needed fill for an overpass or roadbed, they took it from the valley floor. Groundwater soon seeped into the borrow pits.

Knowing this would happen, engineers and fisheries biologists collaborated to ensure that the pits were dug with fish and anglers in mind. The result was the creation of more than 50 clear, deep and productive fishing waters now known as the "I-80 lakes." Forty of them are open to the public.

While the I-80 lakes are the most visible to travelers, there are plenty of other waters within a short drive of the interstate. In eastern Nebraska, flood-control reservoirs built to protect towns, cities and the interstate provide tremendous fishing opportunities and also support boating, jet skiing and other water sports. In western and central Nebraska, large irrigation reservoirs built to provide water for crops, generate hydropower and to cool coal-fired power plants also provide excellent fishing and boating. Other waters near I-80 include farm ponds, park ponds, oxbows and sand pits. The park ponds located in state or city parks and used solely for recreation will be of special interest, so several are included in this guide.



JON FARRAR

Lakes along the interstate provide excellent fishing for a variety of species.

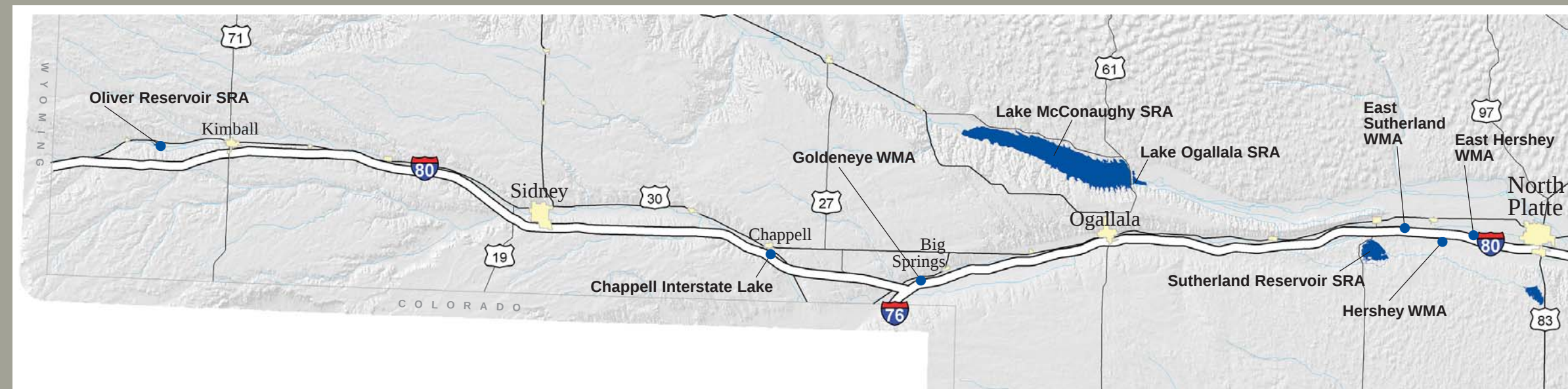
Types of Parks

Virtually every lake or park in Nebraska is named in a way that tells you something about its ownership and primary use. An understanding of these designations may help you decide which lakes would suit you best. The majority of the waters listed are owned and managed by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, the agency in charge of managing the state's fish, wildlife and park resources.

Areas designated as a State Park (SP) have the most accommodations and activities, including lodging, modern campgrounds, restaurants, swimming pools, hiking trails and horseback riding. Many state parks are vacation destinations. Park entry permits are required at these areas and can be purchased on-site. Fishing permits are also available.

State Recreation Areas (SRA) are not as developed as state parks and amenities vary considerably. Most provide camping, drinking water, pit toilets and other basics. Outdoor water fountains and modern restrooms are usually closed for the winter months. Hunting is permitted on many SRA's from the Tuesday after Labor Day through the conclusion of the spring

Western Nebraska



ALL MAPS BY JOHN MILLER, GEODETIC SURVEY TECHNICIAN

turkey season in mid-May, unless posted or restricted by regulations. Park entry permits are required. The larger, more developed SRAs will have permits available. At several smaller SRAs along I-80, campers can self-register at “iron ranger” stations and also purchase a required state park entry permit. Anglers will need to visit a Commission office or permit vendor to obtain a fishing permit.

Many of the I-80 lakes are on State Wildlife Management Areas (WMA). As the name suggests, these areas are managed for wildlife, fishing and hunting. Camping is permitted unless otherwise posted, but few areas have amenities. Do not expect to find drinking water, restrooms, playgrounds, garbage cans or fishing piers. Some may have a small boat ramp. While these areas may be short on amenities, many provide quality fishing. Finding them may take some effort – they may not be shown on maps and there usually are no road signs to follow. Most are on dirt roads. Hunting, trapping and target shooting are permitted on WMAs unless otherwise posted. Park entry permits are not required.

Properties not owned by the Commission have other designations, and amenities will vary. Visitors should

look for special regulations signs when entering any public area.

The I-80 Corridor

This guide provides information about the best fishing lakes within 10 miles of Interstate 80. There are others. For a complete list of public waters, pick up a copy of the annual Nebraska Fishing Guide.

The state has been divided into four regions for this guide: Western Nebraska from the Wyoming border to North Platte; the Western Platte River Valley from North Platte to Lexington; the Central Platte River Valley from Lexington to Grand Island; and Eastern Nebraska from Grand Island to the Missouri River. Directions from I-80, fish species present, facilities offered and a brief description of each area are provided. Parks are listed according to their I-80 exit number as you travel east.

Happy fishing!

Western Nebraska

The most popular destination for recreation along I-80 in this region is Lake McConaughy, Nebraska’s largest lake. Located just north of Ogallala, this 30,000-acre lake has miles of

white, sandy beaches, great fishing and boating, and plenty of places to camp. Nearby Lake Ogallala offers some of the best trout fishing in the Great Plains.

Oliver Reservoir SRA

Oliver Reservoir is a 270-acre flood-control lake built on Lodgepole Creek. Water levels can fluctuate significantly, so boaters should exercise extra caution here.

Fish species: Bluegill, crappie, largemouth bass, yellow perch, walleye, channel catfish, carp, muskie and tiger muskie

Amenities: Concrete boat ramps, wheelchair-accessible fishing pier, primitive camping, pit toilets, picnic shelters, swimming beach, iron ranger self-registration entrance station, hunting allowed

Directions: From Exit 8, go north on Link 53C about 2.5 miles to Highway 30 in Bushnell. Turn right on Highway 30 and go 3.5 miles east to the campground. Additional day use areas are available along Highway 30. From Exit 20, travel north on Highway 71 to Highway 30 in Kimball, and then travel west about 8 miles to the lake. Food, fuel and camping supplies are available in Kimball.

Chappell Interstate Lake

When I-80 was built, Lodgepole Creek was redirected through a new channel to avoid flooding problems. This left the old channel cut off, creating an oxbow lake that was made even larger when additional material was excavated later to be used for interstate construction. The result was a 30-acre lake with clear water. Picnic supplies and other necessities are available less than a mile north in Chappell, which owns and operates this park.

Fish species: Bluegill, largemouth bass, crappie, channel catfish, walleye, yellow perch

Amenities: Concrete boat ramp, restrooms (closed in winter), picnic shelters

Directions: From Exit 85, go north a short distance and take the first right to enter the park.

Goldeneye WMA

This small WMA alongside I-80 has a 17-acre pond.

Fish species: Crappie, bluegill, channel catfish, largemouth bass, yellow perch

Amenities: Rock boat ramp, hunting allowed

Directions: From Exit 107 at Big

Springs, go south 1 mile, then turn right and go 3 miles west on Road 6. Turn right on Road 203 and go north, crossing over I-80. The lake will be immediately on your right.

Lake Ogallala and Lake McConaughy SRAs

At 30,000 acres when full, Lake McConaughy is the largest lake in the state. Located below the dam is 650-acre Lake Ogallala. Together the lakes offer some of the best fishing in Nebraska. Lake Mac is well known for its walleye and also offers exciting fishing for white bass, wipers, smallmouth bass and other species. Lake Ogallala is a tailwater fishery, receiving coldwater from Lake McConaughy that allows it to support trout, many of them trophy-size, year-round. Trout are also caught downstream from Lake Ogallala in the Sutherland Supply Canal. The lakes are extremely popular with anglers, boaters, campers, sunbathers and other recreation-minded people. Weekend use during summer months is very high. Winter visitors can enjoy some exceptional bird watching for waterfowl, gulls and bald eagles. A bald eagle viewing center is located at Lake Ogallala.

Accommodations are available at both public and private establishments

around the lake. Hotels, restaurants, grocery and convenience stores can be found in Ogallala. Highway 61 runs atop Kingsley Dam, providing a great view of both lakes. The Lake McConaughy Visitor and Water Interpretive Center is located along Highway 61 about a mile south of the dam. Here you can learn about the history of the lakes and water usage in Nebraska, get lake maps, purchase necessary permits and borrow fishing tackle.

Fish species (McConaughy): Walleye, wiper, white bass, channel catfish, smallmouth bass, yellow perch, bullhead

Fish species (Ogallala): Rainbow trout, brown trout, walleye, white bass, channel catfish, yellow perch, carp

Amenities: Concrete boat ramps, fish cleaning stations, modern and primitive camping, restrooms, showers, RV dump stations, concessions, picnic shelters, hunting allowed

Directions: From Exit 126, go north on Highway 61 through Ogallala, following the Lake McConaughy road signs through town. Continue north on Highway 61 for about 9 miles to Lake McConaughy. Continue on Highway 61 across the dam and turn right, following directional signs, to get to Lake Ogallala SRA.

Nearby attraction: Ash Hollow State Historical Park (SHP), located west of



BOB GRIER

Young anglers fish from a dock at Oliver Reservoir SRA near Kimball.

Western Nebraska

Lake McConaughy near Lewellen. The area was a popular stopover for westward-bound pioneers along the Oregon Trail and home to prehistoric Indians. Exhibits and a visitor center interpret both eras.

Sutherland Reservoir SRA

Water from this 3,000-acre, canal-fed reservoir helps cool a coal-fired power plant. There is a private campground with electrical hookups and a nine-hole golf course along the north shore.

Fish species: Channel catfish, walleye, white bass, wipers, yellow perch, freshwater drum

Amenities: Concrete boat ramps, primitive camping, pit toilets, iron ranger self-registration entrance station, hunting allowed

Directions: From Exit 158 at

Sutherland, go south on Highway 25 1 mile, turn left on Tower Road. Follow Tower Road around the east side of the lake to the park. You can also continue south on Highway 25 about 4 miles to the camping area and boat ramp located on the southwest shore of the lake.

East Sutherland WMA

This WMA has a 27-acre lake.

Fish species: Northern pike, channel catfish, largemouth bass, bluegill, rock bass, yellow perch

Amenities: Boat ramp

Directions: From Exit 164 at Hershey, go south about 0.25 mile to West Oregon Trail Road. Turn right and go 3 miles west, then turn right on Lamont Road and go 0.5 miles north, crossing over I-80, to the lake.

Hershey WMA

In recent years, this 53-acre lake produced the most trophy-size fish of all the I-80 lakes in western Nebraska.

Fish species: Channel catfish, flathead catfish, largemouth bass, yellow perch, northern pike, rock bass, walleye, bluegill

Amenities: Boat ramp

Directions: From Exit 164 at Hershey, go south to the first left turn and then follow the road 0.2 miles to the lake.

East Hershey WMA

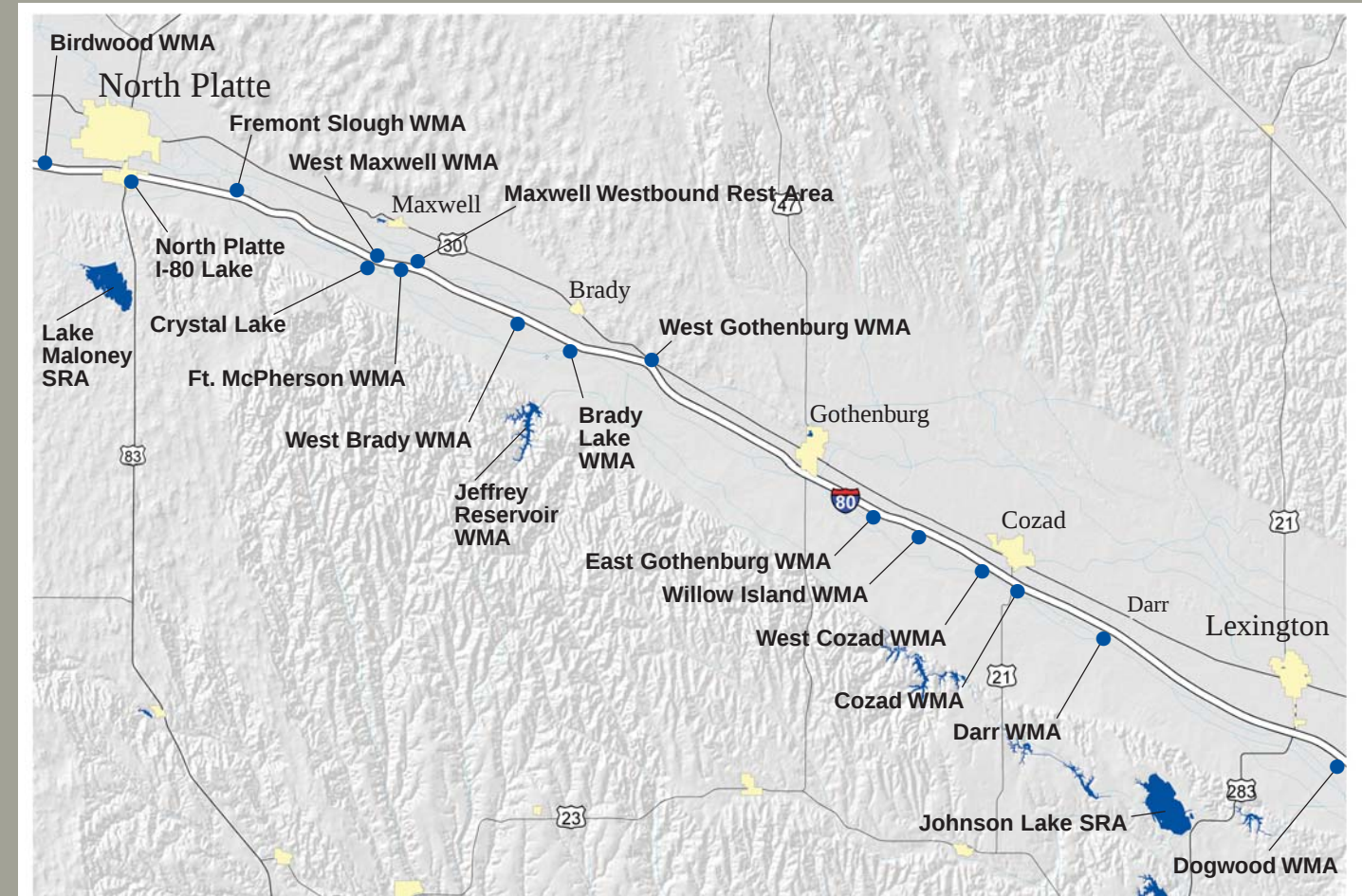
This WMA has a 20-acre lake alongside I-80.

Fish species: Channel catfish, largemouth bass, rock bass, bluegill

Amenities: None

Directions: From Exit 164 at

Western Platte River Valley



Western Platte River Valley

Hershey, go south about 1 mile to West Antelope Road. Turn left and go 5 miles east to South Crane View Road. Turn left and go about 0.5 miles north, crossing over the I-80 overpass. Turn right on West South River Road and follow it a short distance to the lake.

Western Platte River Valley

Just east of North Platte, the South and North Platte rivers join to form the Platte. Dozens of borrow pit lakes lie along Interstate 80, which follows the Platte River through this region rich with farmland. Many of these I-80 lakes are open to public fishing.

North Platte I-80 Lake

The North Platte I-80 Lake, also known as Iron Horse Park, is a city-owned and operated park with a 26-acre lake offering good crappie fishing. A walking trail around the lake, easy shoreline access and a fishing pier provide plenty of space to stretch your legs and find where the fish are biting. There are plenty of food and lodging choices at this exit.

Fish species: Crappie, channel catfish, largemouth bass, northern pike, rock bass, walleye, wiper, bluegill

Amenities: Gravel boat ramp, fishing pier, picnic tables, walking trail

Directions: From Exit 177 at North Platte, go south on Highway 83 to the first traffic signal at Eugene Drive. Turn left, and then left again to enter the park.

Nearby attraction: Buffalo Bill Ranch State Historical Park is located at the northwest edge of North Platte. This site, open seasonally to the public, preserves the home of William F. "Buffalo Bill" Cody that was built in 1886. Park permits are available at the park office. There is a modern campground at the adjacent Buffalo Bill SRA.

Birdwood WMA

The 20-acre lake is a good spot to catch largemouth bass and bluegill. Rainbow trout are stocked during the winter.

Fish species: Largemouth bass, bluegill, rock bass, yellow perch,

channel catfish, rainbow trout (winter)

Amenities: Boat ramp

Directions: From Exit 177 at North Platte, go south on Highway 83 to the second traffic signal at Walker Road. Turn right and go 3.5 miles west, then turn right on Homestead Road. Cross over the I-80 overpass to the lake, which will be on your left.

Fremont Slough WMA

While adjacent to I-80 and readily visible, this 30-acre lake is hard to find without directions.

Fish species:

Largemouth bass, bluegill, channel catfish, carp

Amenities: None

Directions: From Exit 177 at North Platte, go south on Highway 83 about 1.5 miles to State Farm Road. Turn left and go 4 miles east until the paved road makes a sharp 90-degree right turn. Turn left onto Shack Road. This is a dirt road. Drive over a canal bridge, then under I-80. Turn right and go 0.3 miles to the WMA.

Lake Maloney SRA

At 1,600 acres, Lake Maloney is the largest lake in the North Platte area. Private residences line most of the lake, but there is plenty of public access for anglers, including a wheelchair-accessible fishing pier at the lake inlet near the west end of the dam.

Fish species: Channel catfish, flathead catfish, crappie, bluegill, walleye, white bass, wipers, smallmouth bass, carp, freshwater drum

Amenities: Concrete boat ramp, fish-cleaning stations, marina, modern camping with electrical hook-ups and showers, RV dump station, primitive camping, pit toilets, swimming beach, iron ranger self-registration entrance station

Directions: From Exit 177 in North Platte, go south 6 miles on Highway 83, then turn west on South Maloney Drive to the SRA.

Ft. McPherson WMA

This WMA has a 30-acre lake.



Fish the underwater structure and you might catch a hard-fighting largemouth bass such as this one.

Fish species: Smallmouth bass, rock bass

Amenities: Boat ramp

Directions: From Exit 190, go south on Link 56A and take the first left turn to enter the WMA.

Crystal Lake

This is a small, out-of-the-way 7-acre lake.

Fish species: Largemouth bass, bluegill, channel catfish

Amenities: None

Directions: From Exit 190 at Maxwell, go north on Spur 56A about 0.5 miles to West Island Road. Turn left, and follow the road, which runs parallel to I-80, about 6 miles west. Turn left on Novacek Road and cross the I-80 overpass to the lake.

West Maxwell WMA

This 7-acre pond is a good spot to catch bluegill.

Western Platte River Valley



Birdwood Lake near North Platte offers nice scenery and good fishing.

Fish species: Bluegill, channel catfish, largemouth bass, rock bass
Amenities: None
Directions: From Exit 190 at Maxwell, go north on Spur 56A about 0.5 miles to West Island Road. Go west for 0.8 miles, then turn left on Old Military Street and go south 0.2 miles to the WMA.

Maxwell Westbound Rest Area
Travelers heading west on I-80 can stop and fish the 5-acre lake at this rest area, operated by the Department of Roads (DOR). There is a paved walking path from the rest area to the pond, which is located at the west side of the rest area. No camping or boating is allowed.

Fish species: Largemouth bass, bluegill, channel catfish
Amenities: Modern restrooms, drinking water, picnic shelters, vending machines
Directions: Located at the rest area on westbound I-80 near milepost 194.

Brady Lake WMA
This WMA has a 25-acre lake.
Fish species: Largemouth bass, bluegill, channel catfish
Amenities: None
Directions: From Exit 199 at Brady, go south a short distance to the first left turn into the WMA.

West Brady WMA
This WMA has a 6-acre lake.
Fish species: Largemouth bass, bluegill, channel catfish
Amenities: None
Directions: From Exit 199 at Brady, go north 0.5 miles to East Island Road. Turn left and go 2.5 miles west, crossing over I-80.

West Gothenburg WMA
This WMA has a 15-acre lake with good bass fishing.
Fish species: Largemouth bass, bluegill, channel catfish, rock bass, redear sunfish
Amenities: None
Directions: From Exit 199, go north on Link 56D to Brady. Turn right on Highway 30 and go 4.5 miles east. Turn right and drive across the railroad tracks on an unmarked road. The road is just a few yards past mile marker 205. The WMA is on the right.

Jeffrey Reservoir WMA
This area south of Brady has a 900-acre, canal-fed lake.
Fish species: Channel catfish, flathead catfish, crappie, bluegill, walleye, white bass, wiper, freshwater drum, carp
Amenities: Concrete boat ramp, fishing pier, primitive camping, picnic tables, limited hunting
Directions: From Exit 199 at Brady, go 3 miles south to Brady-Moorefield

Road, turn right and go 1.5 miles west to the lake.
East Gothenburg WMA
This WMA has a 15-acre lake.
Fish species: Largemouth bass, rock bass, redear sunfish
Amenities: Concrete boat ramp
Directions: From Exit 211 at Gothenburg, go south on Highway 47 a short distance to Willow Island Road. Turn left and follow the road, which parallels I-80, about 4 miles east to the lake.

Willow Island WMA
This area has a 24-acre lake and access to the Platte River.
Fish species: Largemouth bass, bluegill, channel catfish, carp
Amenities: None
Directions: From Exit 222, go about 1 mile north to Highway 30 in Cozad. Turn left and go about 5 miles west to County Road 416. Turn left and go 1 mile south, crossing the I-80 overpass to the lake.

Cozad WMA
This area has an 18-acre lake and access to the Platte River.
Fish species: Largemouth bass, bluegill, channel catfish, rock bass, carp
Amenities: Concrete boat ramp, hunting allowed
Directions: From Exit 222 at Cozad, go south on Highway 21 a short distance to the first left turn.

West Cozad WMA
This 18-acre lake is hard to find, but anglers are rewarded with quality largemouth bass fishing. The lake was renovated in 2003 to improve the fishery.
Fish species: Largemouth bass, channel catfish, redear sunfish, rock bass
Amenities: None
Directions: From Exit 222, go 0.5 miles north on Highway 21 to West 2nd Street in Cozad. Turn left and go 0.25 miles west, then turn right on Road 225 and go another 0.25 miles north. Turn left on West Railroad Street and go 1 mile west, then turn left and go 1 mile south on Road 419.

Central Platte River Valley

Darr WMA
This WMA includes a 13-acre lake that provides quality largemouth bass fishing.
Fish species: Channel catfish, largemouth bass, bluegill, rock bass
Amenities: None, hunting allowed
Directions: From Exit 231 at Darr, go north on Road 428 to the first left turn. Go 0.25 miles west on Road 756 (dirt road), then turn left and go 0.1 miles south to the WMA.

Dogwood WMA
This WMA has two lakes and access to the Platte River. The 8-acre east lake is larger and offers better fishing than the west lake.
Fish species: Channel catfish, largemouth bass, bluegill, rock bass
Amenities: Concrete boat ramp, hunting allowed
Directions: From Exit 237 at Lexington, go north on Highway 283 a short distance to the first right turn, Heartland Road. Turn right and go 5.5 miles east on Heartland Road to County Road 439. Turn right and go 2.5 miles south, crossing an I-80 overpass to the lake.

Johnson Lake SRA
This 2,190-acre lake south of Lexington is a good place to camp, water ski and fish. Private homes around the lake limit shoreline access, but bank anglers and boat anglers can still find good fishing for walleye and white bass, and some big channel catfish. The inlet on the west side of the lake can be especially productive. Two wheelchair-accessible fishing piers are available there. Campers may register at the park office, where they can also purchase fishing and park entry permits.
Fish species: Flathead catfish, channel catfish, crappie, walleye, sauger, white bass, wiper, smallmouth bass, freshwater drum, carp
Amenities: Concrete boat ramps, fish-cleaning stations, modern camping with electrical hookups and showers, modern restrooms, RV dump station, primitive camping, swimming beach, hike/bike trail, picnic shelters, pit toilets. Restaurants, marinas, bait shops, golf course, and motels nearby.

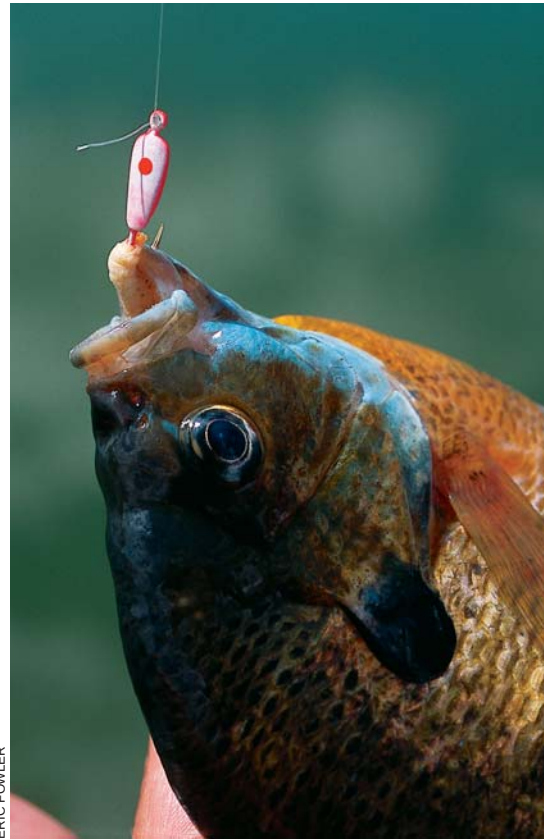
Directions: From Exit 237 at Lexington, go 8 miles south on Highway 283.
Central Platte River Valley
I-80 parallels the Platte River through this farming region, with many small borrow pit lakes along the way. Hundreds of thousands of sandhill cranes and millions of geese and ducks stop on the river on their northward migration in early spring, making it popular with bird watchers.

Blue Hole WMA
This WMA has a 37-acre lake fed by a Platte River channel, with many fish species including plenty of crappies.
Fish species: Crappie, largemouth bass, bluegill, channel catfish, sauger, carp
Amenities: Boat ramp, hunting allowed
Directions: From Exit 257 at Elm Creek, go south a short distance on Highway 183 to the first right turn.

Sandy Channel SRA
This SRA has six lakes, totaling 52 acres. The largest lake, with an improved concrete boat ramp, has excellent water clarity and is often used by scuba divers.
Fish species: Largemouth bass, bluegill, channel catfish, rock bass, yellow perch, carp
Amenities: Concrete boat ramp, primitive camping, pit toilets, hunting allowed
Directions: From Exit 257 at Elm Creek, go 2 miles south on Highway 183 and look for the park entrance on your left.

Union Pacific SRA
The 15-acre lake has good shoreline access.
Fish species: Largemouth bass, smallmouth bass, bluegill, channel catfish, rock bass
Amenities: Gravel boat ramp, modern restrooms and water fountains (closed in winter), pit toilets, primitive camping, picnic shelters, iron ranger self-registration entrance station

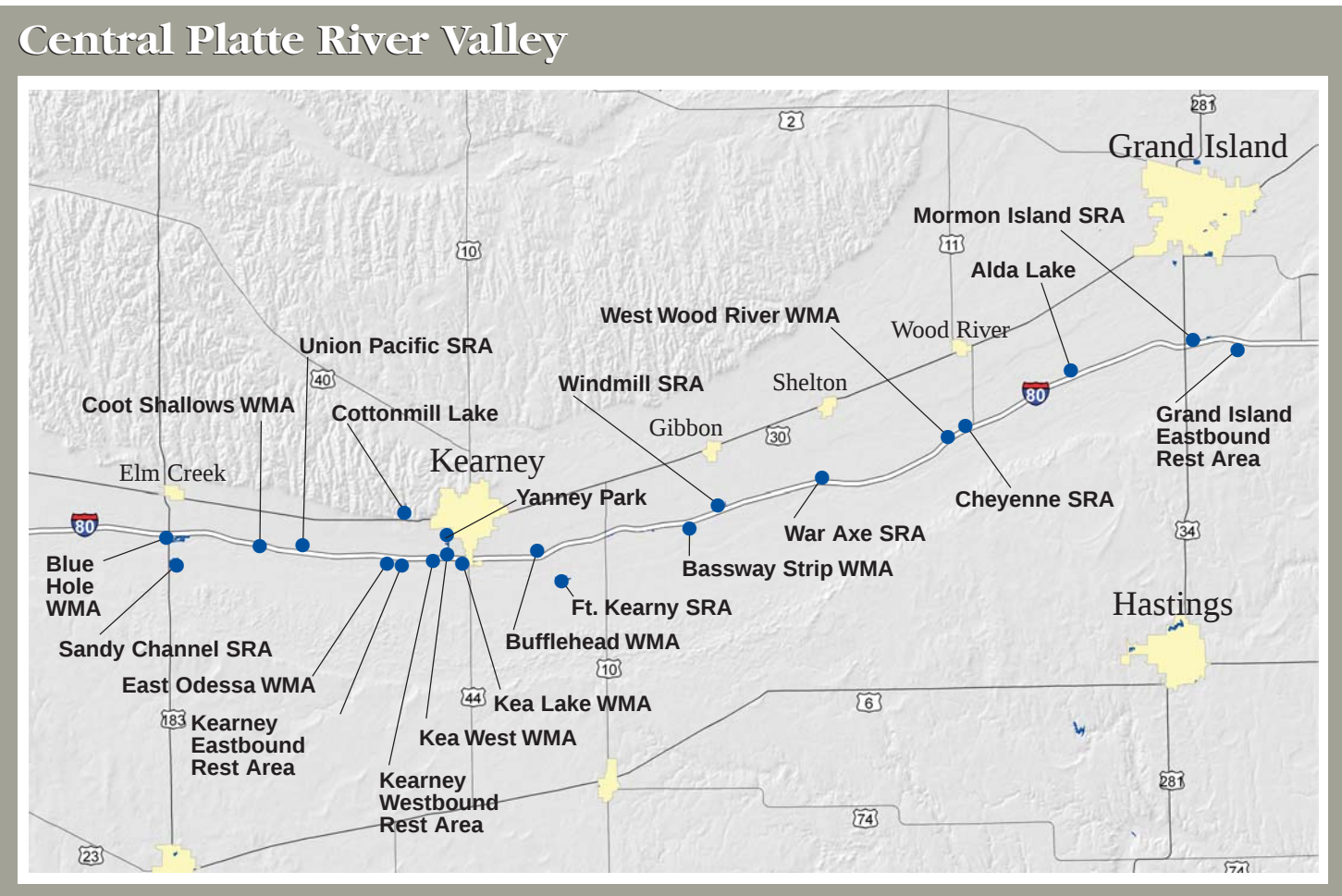
Directions: From Exit 263 at Odessa, go north a short distance on Link 10B to the first right turn.
Coot Shallows WMA
This 12-acre lake was renovated in 2000.
Fish species: Largemouth bass,



Plump, fine-eating bluegill can be caught from almost all the interstate lakes.

bluegill, channel catfish, crappie
Amenities: Concrete boat ramp
Directions: From Exit 263 at Odessa, go north on Link 10B (Odessa Road) about 0.7 miles, then turn left on 11th Road (dirt road) and go 1.8 miles west to Daykin Road. Turn left. The WMA is a short distance ahead on your right.
East Odessa WMA
This area has a 7-acre lake, but is difficult to get to when the dirt access road is wet.
Fish species: Largemouth bass, bluegill, channel catfish
Amenities: Hunting allowed
Directions: From Exit 263 at Odessa,

Central Platte River Valley



travel south to the first left turn, Wildwood Road. Follow this dirt road, traveling parallel to I-80 for 4.5 miles to reach the area.

Kearney Eastbound I-80 Rest Area

A 1-acre pond can be found at this DOR rest area. Camping and boating are not allowed.

Fish species: Largemouth bass, bluegill, channel catfish, crappie, redear sunfish, green sunfish

Amenities: Modern restrooms, water fountains, vending machines, picnic shelters

Directions: From Exit 263 at Odessa, go about 3 miles east on I-80 to rest area.

Kearney Westbound I-80 Rest Area

This DOR rest area has a 7-acre pond with good fishing. Camping and boating

are not allowed.

Fish species: Largemouth bass, bluegill, channel catfish, crappie
Amenities: Modern restrooms, water fountains, vending machines, picnic shelters

Directions: From Exit 272 at Kearney, go 2 miles west on I-80 to rest area.

Ft. Kearny SRA

For travelers looking for a place to camp in the Kearney area, Ft. Kearny SRA is a convenient choice. There are seven small fishing lakes totaling 21 acres with plenty of shoreline access. Lakes 5 and 6 are good for largemouth bass, Lakes 6 and 7 are tops for channel catfish, and Lake 7 is the best spot for bluegill. Fishing tackle can be borrowed to use in the park.

Fish species: Largemouth bass, bluegill, channel catfish, crappie, carp, wiper (Lake 4)

Amenities: Wheelchair-accessible

fishing pier (Lake 7), modern and primitive camping, modern restrooms with showers (closed in winter), pit toilets, hike/bike trail to the Platte River, picnic shelters, swimming beach, small playground, iron ranger self-registration entrance station

Directions: From Exit 272, go south on Highway 44 for about 2 miles to Link 50A. Turn left and go 5 miles east, then turn left and go 1 mile north, following roadside SRA directional signs. Or from Exit 279, go 3 miles south on Highway 10 and 2 miles west on Link 50A.

Nearby attraction: Ft. Kearny SHP, site of a frontier Army post and popular stopover on the Oregon and Mormon Trails. Park and fishing permits are available at the park office.

Yanney Park

Yanney Heritage Park is a city-owned 80-acre park in Kearney that

includes a 20 acre lake. The park is under development, with new facilities being added annually.

Fish species: Largemouth bass, bluegill, channel catfish, crappie

Amenities: Wheelchair-accessible dock, paddleboat rentals, playground, splashground (water sprinklers where the kids can cool off), hike/bike trail connecting to 5-mile trail through Kearney, picnic shelters, observation tower, environmental resource center, restrooms, concession

Directions: From Exit 272, go 1 mile north to 11th Street. Turn left and go 1.3 miles west to Kea West Avenue. Turn left and go 0.3 miles south to the park, on the left.

Bufflehead WMA

This 15-acre lake is good for largemouth bass.

Fish species: Largemouth bass, bluegill, channel catfish, rock bass, yellow perch.

Amenities: Concrete boat ramp
Directions: From Exit 272, go 1 mile north to 11th Street. Turn right and go 3 miles east to Cherry Road. Turn right and go 1 mile south, then turn left. Follow the road east 0.5 miles to the WMA.

Cottonmill Lake

This popular, city-owned, 43-acre lake is open from 7 a.m. to sunset daily. A park permit is not required. A lake rehabilitation project completed in 1999 resulted in excellent water quality and good fishing for largemouth bass, bluegills, channel catfish and crappies. Boating is restricted to 5 mph. Canoes and paddleboats are rented on-site.

Fish species: Crappie, largemouth bass, bluegill, channel catfish, northern pike

Amenities: Concrete boat ramp, boat rentals, playground, pit toilets, walking trail, swimming beach, picnic shelters

Directions: From Exit 272, go 1 mile north on Highway 44 to 11th Street. Turn left and go 2 miles west to 30th Avenue. Turn right and go 1 mile north to 24th Street. Turn left and go about 1.3 miles west to Cottonmill Avenue. Turn right and go 0.25 miles north to the park.

Kea West WMA

This WMA has an 8-acre lake.
Fish species: Largemouth bass, bluegill, channel catfish, crappie, rock bass, yellow perch

Amenities: Primitive boat ramp
Directions: From Exit 272, go 1 mile north to 11th Street. Turn left and go 1.3 miles west to Kea West Avenue. Turn left again and go south, past Yanney Park, about 1 mile to the area, which is on the left.

Kea Lake WMA

This WMA adjacent to I-80 has a 20-acre lake. The Kearney Events Center, home to a local hockey team and many civic events, is located just south of the lake, and gas stations, restaurants and motels are located nearby.

Fish species: Largemouth bass, bluegill, channel catfish

Amenities: Concrete boat ramp
Directions: From Exit 272, go south a short distance on Highway 44 to the first right turn. Drive through the motel parking lot to get to the WMA parking area.

Bassway Strip WMA

Several small lakes are located within this 6-mile long WMA, with the best

fishing at the 7-acre west lake. This lake has excellent water quality and is used by scuba divers.

Fish species: Largemouth bass, bluegill, channel catfish, crappie
Amenities: Concrete boat ramp, hunting allowed

Directions: From Exit 279, go south a short distance on Highway 10 to the first left turn. Turn left and then immediately turn left again. Follow the dirt road north and then east 0.25 miles to the parking area.

Windmill SRA

There are six lakes in the park, totaling 23 acres, with ample shoreline access. Lake 1 is stocked with rainbow trout during the winter months. The lakes have plenty of bluegills, making the SRA a good choice for families with young children. For catfish, try Lake 4. Permits are available at the park office. Food, fuel and groceries are available nearby and 4 miles north in Gibbon.

Fish species: Largemouth bass, bluegill, channel catfish, crappie, wiper (Lake 3)

Amenities: Wheelchair-accessible fishing deck (Lake 2), modern camping with restrooms and showers, electrical hook-ups, RV dump station, swimming beach, picnic shelters, archery range



All the lakes along I-80 offer plenty of bank fishing opportunity, but small boats can be used in most of them as well and can increase an angler's odds for success.

Central Platte River Valley

Directions: From Exit 285, go north a short distance on Link 10C to the first right turn.

War Axe SRA

This 14-acre lake is good for largemouth bass and also holds walleyes.

Fish species: Largemouth bass, walleye, channel catfish, bluegill, yellow perch, carp

Amenities: Modern restrooms (closed in winter), pit toilets, primitive camping, picnic shelters, iron ranger self-registration entrance station

Directions: From Exit 291, turn north on Link 10D and take the first right turn into the SRA.

Cheyenne SRA

This park has an angler-friendly, 17-acre lake and many conveniences.

Fish species: Largemouth bass, bluegill, channel catfish, carp

Amenities: Modern restroom (closed in winter), pit toilets, primitive camping, swing set, picnic shelters, iron ranger self-registration entrance station

Directions: From Exit 300, go north a short distance on Highway 11 to the first left turn, which will take you into the area.

West Wood River WMA

This WMA has a 15-acre lake.

Fish species: Largemouth bass, bluegill, channel catfish

Amenities: None

Directions: From Exit 300, drive south 0.3 miles on Spur 40D, turn right on county road and go 1 mile west. Turn north on 140th Road and cross the I-80 overpass, then turn left and go 0.25 miles west on Binfield Road to the lake. The parking area is another 0.2 miles west, on the left.

Alda Lake

This 12-acre lake is owned by the DOR. There are no facilities at the lake, but food, drinks, and restrooms are available at a gas station located nearby. Camping and boating are prohibited at the lake. No park entry permit is required. Limited parking is available at the northwest corner of the

lake.

Fish species: Largemouth bass, bluegill, channel catfish, northern pike, carp

Amenities: None

Directions: From Exit 305, turn north and drive a short distance to the first right turn past the gas station.

Mormon Island SRA

Located just north of Exit 312, westbound I-80 travelers get a view of Mormon Island SRA as they approach the exit. Grand Island, a few miles north of the park, is Nebraska's fourth-largest city, offering travelers plenty of dining, lodging and shopping choices.

There are three lakes in the park and they are referred to as the East, Middle, and West lakes. The West Lake is the largest at 42 acres and the most convenient for campers and park visitors. The Middle and East Lakes are about 20 acres each and are only accessible by foot. These lakes have easy shoreline access for anglers. West Lake is good for bass, channel catfish and crappies. Campers may register at the park office, where they can also purchase fishing and park entry permits.

Fish species: Largemouth bass, bluegill, channel catfish, crappie, walleye

Amenities: Wheelchair-accessible fishing pier (West Lake), modern camping with electrical hook-ups, modern restrooms, showers, RV dump station, swimming beach (West Lake), limited hunting opportunities

Directions: From Exit 312, go north a short distance on Highway 281 to the first right turn into the park.

Grand Island Eastbound Rest Area

There is a 6-acre lake on the west end of this DOR-owned property open to fishing. Camping and boating are prohibited.

Fish species: Largemouth bass, bluegill, channel catfish

Amenities: Modern restrooms, vending machines, picnic shelters

Directions: From Exit 312 at Grand Island, go 3 miles east on I-80 to the rest area.

Eastern Nebraska



An angler fishes for white bass in Pawnee Lake State Recreation Area.

Eastern Nebraska

Just east of Grand Island, the Platte River continues its slow meander northeast, while I-80 heads straight east to Lincoln. On this end of the state, flood control reservoirs and farm ponds offer the best fishing.

Recharge Lake

This 49-acre lake is owned by the Upper Big Blue Natural Resources District. Camping is not allowed at the area, but there are several motels in York. A park entry permit is not required.

Fish species: Largemouth bass, bluegill, channel catfish

Amenities: Concrete boat ramp, picnic tables, pit toilets, swing set

Directions: From Exit 353, go 3 miles north on Highway 81 to Spur 93D in York. Turn left and go 1.7 miles west to the park entrance, on your right. Follow the entrance road 0.25 miles to the boat ramp. Other facilities are a short distance up that road.

Twin Lakes WMA

This WMA has two lakes, totaling 270 acres. East Twin Lake offers the best fishing; West Twin Lake is shallow

and periodically goes dry. The area is a waterfowl refuge and is closed from October 15 through December 31.

Fish species (East Twin): Largemouth bass, bluegill, channel catfish, crappie, walleye, carp, bullhead

Amenities: Concrete boat ramp (East Lake), limited primitive camping, limited hunting

Directions: From Exit 388 near Pleasant Dale, travel north 0.3 miles on the gravel road to Holdrege Street (dirt road). Turn left and go 0.5 miles west to the East Twin Lake boat ramp and parking area.

Conestoga Lake SRA

This 230-acre lake is popular for boating and water skiing and provides a scenic spot to camp in the Lincoln area.

Fish species: Largemouth bass, bluegill, channel catfish, flathead catfish, walleye, wiper, crappie, freshwater drum, carp

Amenities: Concrete boat ramp, fish cleaning station, modern camping with electrical hook-ups, RV dump station, primitive camping, pit toilets, picnic shelters, iron ranger self-registration entrance station, limited hunting

Directions: From Exit 388, go

0.3 miles south to Highway 6. Turn left and go 5 miles east to Spur 55A, at the town of Emerald. Turn right and go 3 miles south to West Pioneers Blvd. Turn right and go 1 mile west to the lake. Westbound travelers can use Exit 395 instead. Exit south to Highway 6 and then travel west 2.5 miles to Spur 55A at Emerald. Turn left and continue as above.

Pawnee Lake SRA

This 740-acre lake is popular with campers, boaters and anglers in the Lincoln area. Permits are available at the park office, where fishing tackle can be borrowed for use at the lake.

Fish species: Largemouth bass, walleye, white bass, channel catfish, flathead catfish, crappie, carp, freshwater drum

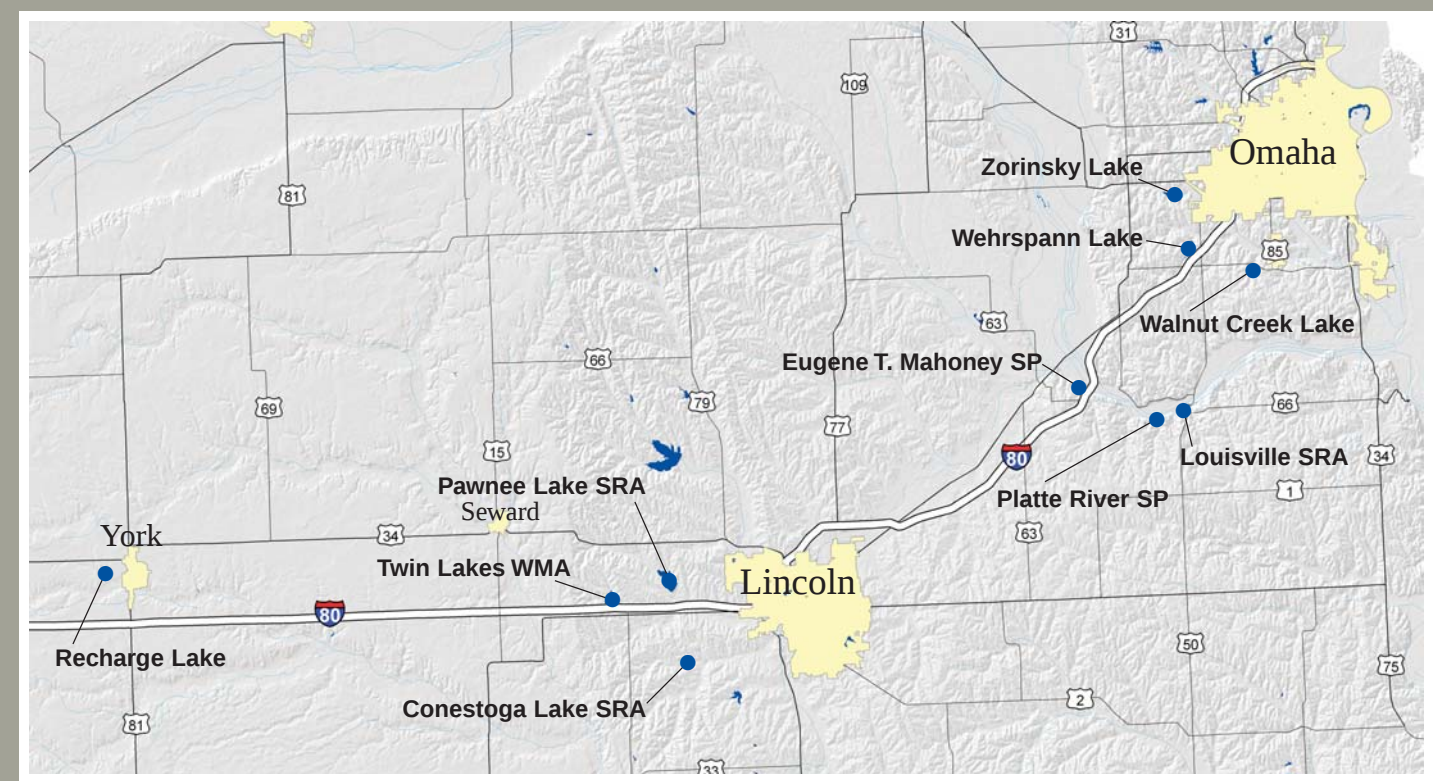
Amenities: Concrete boat ramps, modern camping, modern restrooms (closed in winter), primitive camping, pit toilets, restaurant (summer only), swing set, picnic shelters, swimming beach, hiking trail, limited hunting

Directions: From Exit 388, go 0.3 miles south to Highway 6. Turn left and go 5 miles east to Spur 55A, at the town of Emerald. Turn north on NW 84th Street. Go 2 miles north then turn



Mormon Island State Recreation Area near Grand Island offers fishing and camping experiences for the entire family.

Eastern Nebraska



left and go 1.5 miles west on Adams Street to the lake.

Eugene T. Mahoney SP

Nebraska's most developed and most visited state park lies halfway between

its two largest cities, Omaha and Lincoln, at Exit 426. Travelers will find a host of activities and facilities for the whole family, including fishing, hiking, horseback riding, a water park, picnic shelters, an observation tower, a theater and, in winter, ice skating and tobogganing.

Lodging options include guest rooms in a stately lodge overlooking the Platte River, cabins and a modern campground. The facilities are popular for family reunions and weekend getaways, so reservations are strongly encouraged. A restaurant at the lodge overlooks the Platte River. Campers may register at the park office, where they can also purchase fishing and park entry permits.

Anglers can fish 4-acre Baright (formerly known as Marina) Lake or 10-acre Qwest Lake. Both have special regulations in place to ensure fish populations are maintained. Baright Lake is located near the campground. Turn right after the park entrance booth and follow the park road 0.5 miles to Baright Lake, where children under

16 years of age, adults with disabilities and adults assisting children who are fishing are allowed to fish. Qwest Lake is another 0.5 miles further down the road. Boats are not allowed on either lake. Fishing tackle can be borrowed for use in the park.

Fish species (Baright Lake): Bluegill, largemouth bass, channel catfish.

Fish species (Qwest Lake): Bluegill, largemouth bass, channel catfish, crappie, rainbow trout (winter)

Amenities: Fishing piers, fish cleaning station at Qwest Lake, lodging, modern camping with electrical hook-ups, restrooms and showers, RV dump station, restaurant, paddleboat rentals, playground, water park, picnic shelters

Directions: From Exit 426 at Ashland, take Highway 66 about 0.5 miles west to the park entrance.

Platte River SP

This is another scenic area reached via I-80 Exit 426. Platte River State Park is located in the oak-forested bluffs on the south rim of the Platte

River Valley, and is popular with hikers and mountain bikers. The 4-acre Jenny Newman Lake is ideal fishing water for young children. Only those under 16 years old and adults assisting children are allowed to fish in this catch-and-release-only lake. Parents can have a lot of fun watching their kids catch fish, including some trophy-sized specimens. Visitors can borrow fishing tackle to use at the lake. Fishing and park entry permits are available at the park office.

Fish species: Largemouth bass, bluegill, channel catfish

Amenities: Modern cabins (camping is available at nearby Louisville SRA), hiking and mountain biking trails, swimming pool, tennis courts, observation tower, picnic shelters, pit toilets. Modern restrooms, snacks, drinks, and paddleboat rentals are available in the summer.

Directions: From Exit 426, travel 6.5 miles east on Highway 66. The park entrance road is on the left. To get to Jenny Newman Lake, turn left at the entrance booth and follow the park road 0.5 miles.

Nearby attraction: Schramm Park SRA, site of Nebraska's first fish hatchery, and the popular Ak-Sar-Ben Aquarium and Outdoor Education Center.

Louisville SRA

Located on the south bank of the Platte River, Louisville SRA has five small lakes totaling 40 acres plus river fishing opportunities. Campground scenes in the Jack Nicholson movie *About Schmidt* were filmed here.

Campers may register at the park office, where they can also purchase fishing and park entry permits and borrow fishing tackle for use at the park.

Fish species (lakes): Largemouth bass, bluegill, channel catfish, crappie, wiper (Lake 2 only)

Fish species (river): Channel catfish, flathead catfish, shovelnose sturgeon, freshwater drum, carp

Amenities: Modern camping with electrical hook-ups, modern restrooms with showers (closed in winter), RV dump station, tent camping, pit toilets,

swimming beach, picnic shelters, nature trails, swing set. A concession is open during the summer, offering food and drinks.

Directions: From Exit 426, travel 8.5 miles east on Highway 66 to its junction with Highway 50. Turn left on Highway 50 and go 1.5 miles north. The park entrance will be on your left. Travelers may also leave I-80 at Exit 440 and travel 11 miles south on Highway 50 to the park.

Walnut Creek Lake

One of the newest lakes in eastern Nebraska, Walnut Creek is a 100-acre flood control lake built with fish and quality fishing in mind. The lake area closes at 10 p.m. There are no garbage cans here, so pack your trash out.

Fish species: Largemouth bass, bluegill, channel catfish, redear sunfish, crappie

Amenities: Concrete boat ramp, fishing jetties, wheelchair-accessible fishing pier, paved walking trail around the lake, pit toilets, playground, picnic shelters, modern campground, leash-free dog exercise area

Directions: From Exit 439, go 5 miles east on Highway 370 to 96th Street in Papillion. Turn right and go 0.4 miles to the first entrance on the right, where you'll find a playground for the kids, a picnic shelter, pit toilets, and trail access. Or, continue on 96th Street another 0.4 miles to Schramm Road, then turn right and go 1 mile to the park entrance on the right for the campground, boat ramp, and other facilities.

Wehrspann Lake

The Papio-Missouri River NRD owns this 245-acre lake in southwest of Omaha. No park entry permit is required. The park closes at 10 p.m.

Fish species: Largemouth bass, bluegill, channel catfish, blue catfish, crappie, walleye, bullhead

Amenities: Concrete boat ramp, fishing pier, pit toilets, paved walking trail, picnic shelters

Directions: Take Exit 440 at Highway 50 and go north 0.25 miles to the first traffic signal. Turn left on Cornhusker Road and follow it 0.9 miles

to the lake. To access the main entrance and boat ramp, continue north on Highway 50 another 0.75 miles to Giles Road and turn left. The entrance is 0.9 miles ahead, on the left.

Zorinsky Lake

The city-owned park at 255-acre Zorinsky Lake is regarded as one of the premier parks in Omaha. Camping is not allowed, and the park is open only from 5 a.m. to 11 p.m.

Fish species: Largemouth bass, bluegill, channel catfish, blue catfish, crappie, walleye

Amenities: Concrete boat ramp, wheelchair-accessible fishing pier, paved walking trail, playgrounds, picnic shelters, restrooms

Directions: From Exit 440, go north 2 miles on Highway 50 to Harrison Street. Turn left and go 1 mile west to 156th Street. Turn right and go 2 miles north to F Street, and then turn left into the park. There is additional access to the trail and lake on 168th Street, one mile north of Q Street. ■



A young angler reels in a trout at Mahoney State Park's Qwest Lake near Ashland.



Hefty bluegill can be caught from Platte River State Park's Jenny Newman Lake.

THE GARTER BALL

By Dan Fogell, Biology Instructor
Southeast Community College, Lincoln, Nebraska

A little known harbinger of spring, the garter snake's "mating ball" is one of nature's most unusual sights.

Each year, spring's arrival is revealed in a number of familiar ways. Songbirds sing in a frantic attempt to attract mates, the browns and yellows of winter give way to fresh greens and, of course, garter snakes assemble in great writhing masses. Okay, maybe that last event isn't as familiar as the others, but it is one of spring's most spectacular sights, and just because snakes don't sing a charming song doesn't mean they are not entitled to partake in the rites of the season.

Each year, garter snakes in Nebraska and all over North America perform an extravagant mating ritual when they emerge from winter hibernation. Female garter snakes release a pheromone – kind of a biological "perfume" – that attracts male garter snakes. In fact, the pheromone is so attractive to male garters that it puts them in something of a trance when they arrive at the female en masse. Sometimes dozens of male garter snakes will wriggle, writhe and twist all over a single female as they try to win her affection. Not only are they trying to impress

her, they're trying to out-compete the other males and win exclusive breeding rights.

This phenomenon has been witnessed by many human observers and is often referred to as a "mating ball." So entranced are the males that they follow the female anywhere she goes, even up into tree branches. The courtship ritual ends when the female selects a mate. The male gives off a pheromone of his own while mating that is repulsive to other male garter snakes, so they leave and search for another female and try their luck again.

Nowhere is this annual ritual more spectacular than in Manitoba, Canada, where each spring tens of thousands of red-sided garter snakes emerge from communal den sites and commence with courtship. The sight is so impressive that it draws tourists from all over the world, and the snakes are so involved with their ritual that they are oblivious to human observers.

Some males have figured out how to avoid the whole wriggling contest and still have the chance to breed. These males secrete a pheromone mimicking the female's and lure

spellbound males away. Once they are some distance away and completely preoccupied with each other, the mimicking male sneaks back to the unattended female and secures his right to breed. By the time the other snakes realize a female isn't present, the breeding male has already released his repulsive pheromone.

The red-sided garter (*Thamnophis sirtalis parietalis*) is the Great Plains'

subspecies of the common garter snake and is one of four garter snake species indigenous to Nebraska. It has four rows of alternating red and black spots along the back and sides, with a bright yellow stripe down the middle of the back. Red-sided garters are found throughout the state, are active during the day and can often be seen patrolling the edges of ponds and streams looking for prey. They eat nearly anything

they can catch, including earthworms, fish, frogs, toads, salamanders and even nestling birds. They even try to eat road-killed frogs and toads.

Female adult garter snakes are larger than males and give live birth in late summer to 15 to 20 young that are simply smaller versions of their parents. After they are born, the young snakes are on their own while feeding, finding shelter and avoiding predators –

they get no help from their mother. In late fall, red-sided garter snakes take shelter for the winter, using rock outcrops and animal burrows to avoid the extreme cold. Garter snakes are tolerant of cold temperatures, however, and have been observed every month except January in Nebraska. The mating ball ritual, however, is strictly a springtime activity and will always be a harbinger of a new season of life. ■



This garter snake mating ball was photographed at Burchard Lake in Pawnee County after an early spring prescribed grassland fire.

MICHAEL FORSBERG



Mike "Skunk" Rice of Wheatland, Wyoming enjoys morning coffee outside his lodge at the Raiders' 2005 Memorial Day Rendezvous.

Camp Clarke Raiders

Family-style Muzzleloading

Photos and text by Ken Bouc

The Camp Clarke Raiders have been rendezvousing twice a year for 30 years, shooting muzzleloaders, throwing tomahawks and just having fun as they remember a time gone by.

The camp began to stir as a few early risers stepped out of their canvas tents and tipis to build fires for breakfast, fetch water, or just admire the towering butte across the creek as it caught the day's first golden light. It was a big encampment – 20 lodges or more nestled in the trees along the near bank of the creek and about as many on the far side.

It could easily have been a scene from another time – a campsite full of people wearing buckskin britches and calico shirts, fussing over sturdy Plains rifles and an occasional slender Kentucky rifle as they waited for breakfast. A trader's tent was filled with tomahawks, wide-brimmed hats, flints, and numerous gadgets and gewgaws. It was reminiscent of an 1830s rendezvous, where mountain men met with traders in remote Rocky Mountain valleys to sell their catch of furs and secure another year's supply of powder and ball, knives, coffee, tobacco, whiskey and other necessities.

Evidence of the 21st century was hard to spot in the "traditional" camp on the north bank of the creek – in fact, all that gave it away was the glint of hardware coming through the trees from the encampment on the opposite bank as sunlight reflected off the bumpers and fixtures of modern vehicles and campers. "Amenities" (outhouses) stood a short distance away on one side, and playground equipment at the other.

The Camp Clarke Raiders were on their Pumpkin Creek stomping grounds in the shadows of Courthouse and Jail rocks south of Bridgeport as they observed their 30th anniversary in 2005. Some of their celebrating would be done Memorial Day weekend at their spring rendezvous, and the rest at their Labor Day weekend rendezvous.

People in strange dress – blue jeans, shorts, T-shirts and ball caps – started appearing on the near side of the creek,

having descended from the parking lot on the high ground or crossed the Pumpkin Creek time warp between their modern campground and this encampment of the 1800s. Soon the crack of muzzleloading rifles and the bouquet of black powder smoke drifting in from the range would overpower the chatter of the camp and its aroma of woodsmoke and frying bacon.

After the visitors plied the traditional campers with their usual questions – "What's he doing?" or "What's that contraption for?" – the inevitable "Why do you do this?" was bound to come.

"That's the real question. I hope we're doing this because it's fun. That's what this is all about," said LeRoy Eichthaler, club president and one of the original Raiders.

"And we want people to know that we'd like to share it with them," added Rod Skarboe, also one of the original Raiders and a current member of the club's board of directors. "This is a fun place, a safe place, and whoever wants to come out and see it for themselves is welcome."

This willingness to open their camp and share the fun they've discovered wasn't always standard Raiders' practice. In the early days, the group kept their shoots and rendezvous strictly "stag."

In 1975, Skarboe, Eichthaler and a few others met and formed their black powder club at the Camp Clarke Bridge site a few miles west of Bridgeport. Camp Clarke was a frontier army blockhouse that guarded a vital bridge over the North Platte River, and accounts for the first part of the organization's name. As for the rest of the name: "We thought we were kind of wild and tough, and that's where the 'Raiders' part came from," Eichthaler chuckled.

After a few years, the Raiders decided to become a more family-oriented group and adopted corresponding



The Camp Clarke Raiders hold their rendezvous in the shadows of Courthouse and Jail rocks, five miles south of Bridgeport on Nebraska Highway 88. Turn west on the access road to the landmarks and watch for the turnoff to the range and camp.



Lanterns and campfires are lit as the sun sets behind Courthouse Rock and dusk settle in.



Jessica (left) and Kassidy Kildow of Bridgeport play patty-cake as they wait for breakfast.

bylaws. A club safety director position was created, and since then a range officer has always been in charge whenever any shooting is done.

Women and children are now welcome on the firing line, and several other events are geared toward them as well. “The men are still shooting, the wives have been shooting for some time and now our kids and some grandkids are shooting. It’s really a family thing now, and that’s not just here at Bridgeport. Just about every black powder club in Nebraska and surrounding states has gone through something like this,” Eichthaler said.

The Raiders and other clubs of their type were built around shooting venerable, old-style black powder guns,

usually replicas of firearms from the early 1800s, and that is still the case today. Modern “in-line” muzzleloaders, on the other hand, are not regarded with favor or allowed on the firing line.

During the rendezvous the Raiders’ range is usually busy from 8 a.m. until after sunset with men, women and kids shooting in all kinds of competitions and games, but there are also events that involve more than shooting. These include tomahawk, knife and spear throwing competitions; fire-starting with flint and steel; and various “mountain man runs” that usually involve shooting, throwing, setting traps and other skills.

One particularly zany Raiders event is “LeRoy’s Famous Pancake Run.”

Eichthaler is probably the LeRoy guilty of concocting this competition, which consists of a mountain gal preparing an egg and pancake, extracting a draught of milk from a wooden cow and serving the breakfast to her mountain man. Since it is a timed event, the egg and pancake spend but a few seconds on the griddle and the mountain gal must be quick of hand and fleet of foot. Since this is not exactly a gourmet experience, it is also best if the mountain man has a huge sense of humor and an

iron stomach.

Shooting events at these rendezvous can be equally imaginative. First, there are no paper targets. Instead, the Raiders shoot at a variety of iron targets at all kinds of distances as part of individual, couples and team competitions with rifles and pistols. Some of the targets are iron silhouettes of prairie dogs, rabbits, chickens, turkeys, turkey heads, coyotes, buffalo and pigs. The farthest target, a bear, is 180 yards from the shooter. There are also gongs, spinning



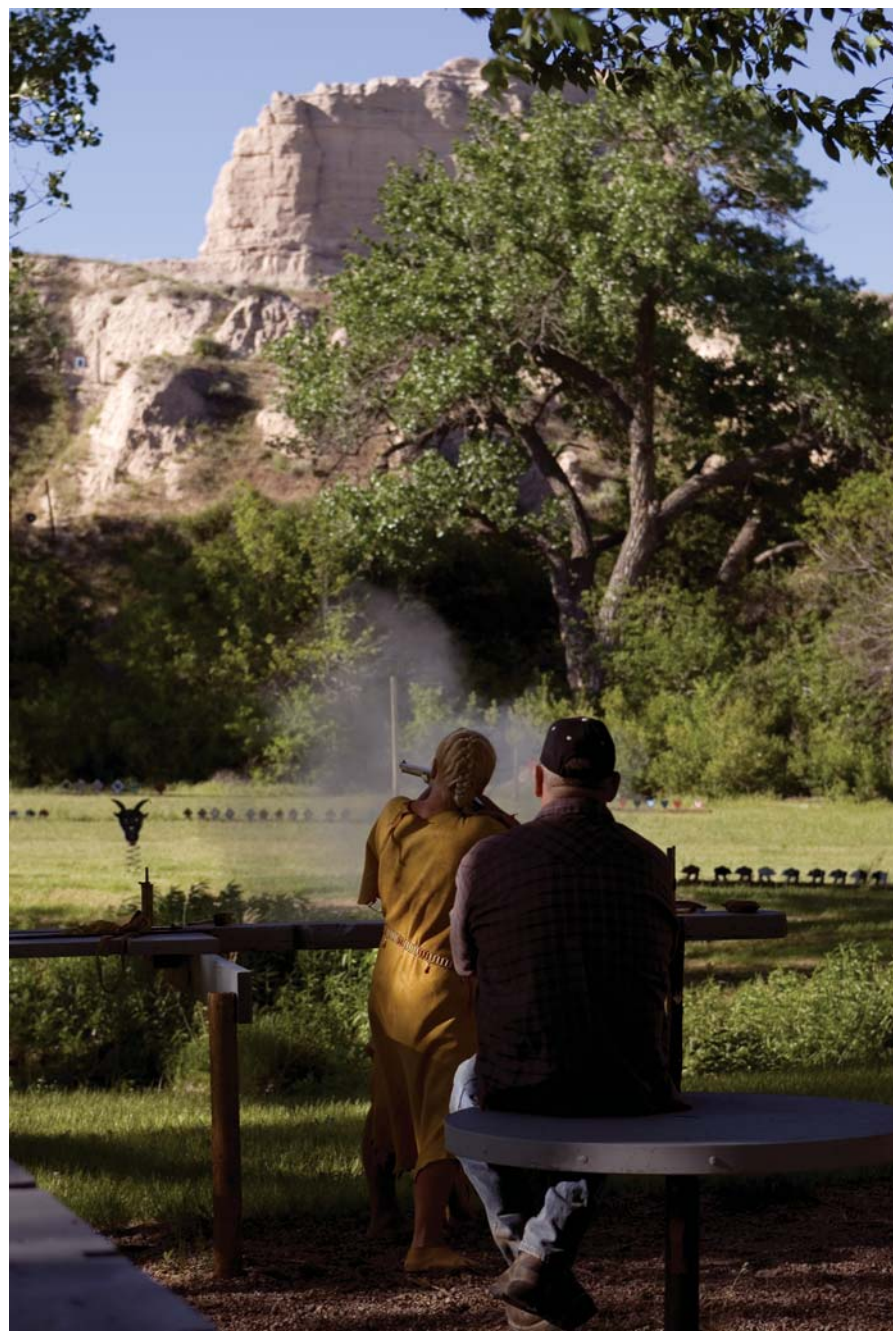
Don “Hondo” Hall of Bridgeport tends to breakfast while a hungry Rod “Wildman” Skarboe waits impatiently.

targets that resemble weather vanes and iron plates suspended from wires partway up a very distant bank. To the right of the plates is an iron skunk that many shooters consider the most difficult target of all. “We don’t like shooting paper,” Skarboe said. “When we shoot, we like to see something fall over, move or make some noise.”

For the club’s poker shoot, contestants roll dice to determine which target they are supposed to shoot and which shooting position they must use. If they hit their target, they draw a card from a

deck. Luck in rolling the dice for easy targets and in drawing a good hand is at least as important as a steady hand and a keen eye for this contest – the winner is determined by the best poker hand at the end of five rounds.

Speedy loading and accurate shooting is the deciding factor in the post shoot, which is won by the first threesome to cut a four-inch post completely in two with rifle balls from a distance of 25 yards. There’s also trap shooting with muzzle-loading shotguns, various pistol competitions and a candle shoot



Dar “Duh” Panas of Bridgeport fires at an iron silhouette on the Raiders’ range.



Brenda Pike of Kearney tries her hand at shooting a traditional muzzleloader with the help of her stepfather, Jim Winslow.

after dark in which shooters try to snuff out a flame without hitting the candle.

While the Raiders’ shoots differ quite a bit from what other clubs do, club members have just as much fun competing at the other events. “We’ve gone to some clubs that do nothing but shoot holes in paper. They don’t even have any silhouettes. You know you’re going to shoot paper when you leave home, and you go to have fun, meet people, greet friends ... the same people that come here to shoot our iron targets. A lot of the people at this rendezvous are from those clubs,” Eichthaler said.

The good, clean fun of building, fussing over and shooting of old-style muzzleloaders is an important appeal of “buckskinning,” as it is sometimes

called, but for those who get involved in mountain man dress and period equipment and skills, it has a deeper meaning. “We’re re-creating a period that we missed out on ... we should have been there,” Skarboe said.

“It’s something we learned in our history books. Now we’re living it, and we’re passing it on to the kids,” added Nancy Eichthaler, LeRoy’s wife and the club’s secretary.

According to LeRoy Eichthaler, his buckskins, lodge and other period accouterments are merely options as far as rendezvousing is concerned. “You don’t have to have it, but it’s just something that we like to do, running around at a rendezvous in period dress. In the traditional camp, you step back





“Skunk” Rice watches as “Wild Man” Skarboe and LeRoy “Horny” Eichthaler compete in a Mountain Man Run event.



“Cutting the cards” takes on a new meaning in the tomahawk throwing competition.



A keen eye, steady hand and a lot of luck produce a winning hand in the poker shoot.

in life. There’s no TV, there’s no cell phones,” he said.

Many of today’s traditional buckskinners make their period clothing and equipment themselves. Some of them hit the books or the Internet to learn about authentic dress and gear of the American West in the 1820s and ‘30s. Or they look around at various rendezvous until they decide what they’re going to make and how it’s going to look.

Other people buy period clothes and paraphernalia from vendors at black powder events or various catalogs and specialty stores. A piece of buckskin costs about \$4 per square foot and a pair of buckskin pants and shirt or a buckskin dress sells for about \$300. A

tipi cover will cost \$800 to \$1,000, and 17 tipi poles at about \$17 each will add up to nearly \$300 more. “Either way, they’re going above and beyond, getting into the spirit of this and trying to do everything they can to make it original,” Skarboe said.

Indeed, some go beyond the black powder rifle, buckskin britches and tipi or wall tent. During rendezvous, even their identities change, and they answer to buckskin names. In camp, Skarboe is “Wild Man.”

“When I was 15 years old, my best friend hung ‘Wild Man’ on me – why, I don’t know – and it stuck for 40 years. Now I own a bar with Wild Man’s name on it,” Skarboe said.

The reasoning behind other names is

much clearer: “Skunk” picked up his buckskin name from the skunk-skin cap he wears, “Foxy” got his in a similar manner, and LeRoy Eichthaler’s “Horny” nickname came about because of the distinctive headgear he wore for a while — a hat made out of a buffalo skull, with one horn that held powder for priming a cannon. Both the hat and the name have since been retired.

Horny hung “Lightfoot” on a fellow Raider who lost some toes in a grain auger, and Lightfoot liked his new handle so much he made it into a logo and stamped it on all his buckskinning gear. “Coony” earned his buckskin name when he cooked a raccoon for a Raiders dinner.

“Buckskin names are earned according



Ignited by sparks from a flint and steel, tinder erupts in flames during one of a rendezvous’ many competitions.



Above: Perry Sage of Arnold warms up his Kentucky rifle at dusk in preparation for a candle shoot. Below: A mortar loaded with a heavy dose of black powder announces last call for breakfast to any sleepyheads still in bed.



to what you do, how you do it, or if you get caught doing it,” said LeRoy Eichthaler.

The nicknames aren’t just for guys, either – at least one mountain gal in the Raiders camp also has a buckskin name, but “Duh” wouldn’t say how she earned hers.

Buckskin names are free, and the rest of muzzleloading doesn’t have to be expensive, according to LeRoy Eichthaler. Beginners can start with just a rifle for about \$250, learning to load, shoot and take care of it. They can then build on that if they wish.

“If they want to buy a lodge, if

they want to get into buckskins, that’s fine – we love it if they do. But if they don’t, that’s just fine, too. Just because they’re in a pair of blue jeans doesn’t mean we don’t want them here,” he said.

The Raiders will rendezvous as usual in 2006, holding their 61st over Memorial Day weekend and their 62nd Labor Day weekend, and the welcome mat will again be out. Buckskinners from other clubs will be there as usual, but they’re also hoping for visitors – history buffs, the just plain curious, even the slightly interested. If someone wants to try shooting a muzzleloader, throwing a tomahawk, starting a fire

with flint and steel or most any other activity, they can watch it being done, talk to those doing it and find someone willing to let them try it. ■

Raiders events may be too distant or otherwise inconvenient for some, but there are other options for those wanting a whiff of black powder smoke. Like the Raiders, the other 23 clubs of the United Nebraska Muzzleloading Rifle Association welcome visitors to their events. One good opportunity is the Red White and Blue Shoot, held

May 26-29 and sponsored by the Nebraska Muzzleloading Rifle Association, a club in the Grand Island area. To get there, travel three miles north of Cairo on Highway 11, turn left and go west for five miles.

Pioneer Longrifles events, held one weekend each month at Indian Cave State Park in southeastern Nebraska, are another good bet. For a listing of Nebraska muzzleloading clubs, their contact information and event schedules, visit the UNMLA web site at <http://www.nebraskamuzzleloaders.com/>.



Bill Petersen of Kimball and Carl “Foxy” Shaw of Bridgeport trade yarns.

Bighorn Sheep Hit Hard by Disease

Pasteurella pneumonia having large effect on Nebraska's bighorn sheep

By Eric Fowler

For more than 20 years, Nebraska's bighorn sheep managed to avoid problems that herds in other states commonly face. That all changed late in 2004, and in 2005 it got worse.

Gary Schlichtemeier, district wildlife manager in the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission's Alliance office, estimates up to half of the 120 to 130 bighorn sheep that roamed the Fort Robinson area in northwestern Nebraska died in late-2004 and early 2005. While not confirmed, biologists suspect the deaths were due to pasteurella pneumonia, a bacteria-caused respiratory disease.

That herd had grown from a dozen Rocky Mountain bighorns released into a 500-acre enclosure at Fort Robinson State Park in 1981. The last of that original herd and their progeny were set free in the Pine Ridge in 1993. The recent deaths have forced the Commission to cancel this fall's bighorn sheep season. One or two Nebraska permits had been issued by lottery or auction each year since 1998, raising approximately \$600,000 for Nebraska's sheep program.

This past winter the disease hit a second herd, this one in the Wildcat Hills near Gering. Having grown to 55 animals from the 22 sheep acquired from Colorado in 2001, the herd has been reduced to about 30. Most of the deaths came in late-February and early March and were confined to a portion of the herd that inhabits an area about 5 miles southwest of Cedar Canyon Wildlife Management Area.

"We don't know if we're out of the woods there yet — we had a sheep coughing a lot on Cedar Canyon late last week," Todd Nordeen, a Commission biologist working on a graduate study of the Wildcat Hills



After removing its front leg for testing, Commission biologist Todd Nordeen calls a veterinarian to discuss the death of a yearling bighorn sheep ram.

sheep herd, said in mid-March.

Nordeen and a fellow researcher quickly recovered the sheep fitted with radio collars that died and a few without collars. Tests confirmed pneumonia as the cause of death.

Pasteurella pneumonia has plagued bighorn sheep across North America for more than a century and followed the introduction of domestic livestock. The disease also hit the Custer State Park herd in South Dakota's Black Hills in 2004 and 2005, taking 75 percent of the 200 animals there. Another recent die-off occurred in New Mexico.

"It's not uncommon," said Schlichtemeier, "but we thought we would get away with being special out here."

There are many strains of the pasteurella bacteria. Nordeen said most bighorns carry some of the nonfatal strains and domestic sheep can sometime carry strains that are fatal to bighorns yet which do not affect the domestic sheep.

Researchers believe interactions between the two species can help

spread the disease, but while there are domestic sheep 10 miles from the Wildcat Hills herd, there is no evidence interaction caused this outbreak. The bacteria can also persist in the environment.

It is believed that stress allows the bacteria to cause pneumonia. Nordeen said researchers believe the bacteria is spread from direct contact between sheep and by the coughing and sneezing of sick animals. While the disease seldom kills every animal that contracts it, he said immunity to the disease has not evolved and die-offs are cyclical.

Biologists have provided the surviving sheep in the Wildcat Hills with apple mash and alfalfa hay laced with antibiotics as both a curative and preventative measure. They also have shot some sheep with darts designed to deliver the medication. In either case, animals need three doses of medication for it to be effective and because of mild weather this winter, the sheep were not easily attracted to the medicated feed. Those efforts were to resume following this year's mid-March snow.

On a positive note, there has been no sign of the disease in the 49 sheep acquired from Montana in January 2005 and released in the Pine Ridge southeast of Crawford. Schlichtemeier said those animals and the approximately 26 lambs they had last spring have split into three groups, with one group remaining near the release site on Bighorn WMA, another living on the nearby Ponderosa WMA and the third near Chadron State Park.

Biologists hope to put more collars on sheep in the Fort Robinson herd, and the Commission is working with Chadron State College to develop a graduate study there to learn more about the disease and what may be causing the animal's stress. ■

Springtime Crappies

Marabou jigs and May crappies go hand in hand

By Tom Keith

In Nebraska, most crappie fishing begins in early May when shallow parts of lakes and ponds start to warm and crappie move toward shore to forage on small minnows and invertebrates and to spawn.

As the fish move into the shallows, anglers can easily target them by casting small jigs from the bank, wading or by using a float tube a few yards off shore and making short casts toward the bank.

The jig should be cast into areas where crappie commonly congregate, such as rocky lake bottoms, rocky dam-faces, under overhanging tree limbs and in shoreline vegetation. Crappie love the cafeteria-style dining that these areas offer, such as terrestrial insects that fall from trees growing along the bank and the aquatic insects and schools of minnows that are found in shallow water vegetation. The shoreline vegetation also provides warm water in the spring and fall, and shade in the summer.

There are many types of crappie jigs, but the most common is the marabou jig, which consists of a tuft of fluffy, marabou feather fibers tied to a hook shank behind a weighted jig head. Fancier models have a chenille body and marabou fibers for the tail. This lure is so effective because underwater the marabou fibers produce seductive movements that crappie can't ignore and the weighted jig head allows the lure to be fished at whatever depth the fish are found.

Other popular crappie jigs have tails of thin plastic strips or hackle



Using jigs can be a fun and effective way to catch hefty crappies in the spring.

feathers. Some have soft plastic bodies and thin curved tails that make the jig twist as it moves through the water. Others, such as Roadrunners, have a small spinner attached to the head of the lure to give it an added flash.

Though nearly all jigs produce fish under a variety of conditions, marabou and plastic-hackled types usually produce best when jigged slowly and vertically, so the tail material is allowed to puff out and wave enticingly as the lure bumps among rocks and along the lake bottom.

Jigs with plastic twister tails are most effective when cast and retrieved horizontally through the water. They require a steadier,

more rapid motion to make the plastic tail flutter and twist, and varying the retrieve speed changes the action.

Jigs are extremely versatile — there is more than one way to fish them properly. Sometimes a certain retrieve rhythm works best, but when that rhythm doesn't work, trying another might entice a strike.

Color can be an important factor in crappie fishing. Start with the old axiom "In dark water or at night use a dark jig, in clear water use a light-colored jig." If that doesn't work, experiment until you find the right combination of jig color and retrieve for the current situation.

Light and ultra-light spinning gear is ideally suited to crappie fishing. Most crappie anglers choose 1/32nd- or 1/16th-ounce jigs for normal situations, but if they have to go unusually deep they may choose a jig weighing

as much as 1/8th ounce. Lighter jigs have an advantage because they are smaller and fall more slowly when cast near cover, and in most situations a slow descent is more productive than a rapid one.

Jigs can also be "sweetened" with a small minnow to attract reluctant feeders. Hook the minnow from below the chin up through the front of its head. This makes the minnow move through the water in a natural position and it is more securely hooked than if it was hooked through the lips. A word of caution — be sure to check page 10 of the 2006 Nebraska Fishing Guide to make sure live baitfish are legal for the body of water you are fishing. ■



Marabou Jig



Roadrunner



Twister-tail Jig

Classifieds

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Parks & Places

Red Willow Reservoir

Fishing, hunting and wildlife viewing opportunities abound

By Rocky Hoffmann

In 1962, the Bureau of Reclamation closed a 3,000-foot-long earthen dam in southwestern Frontier County. The created reservoir was officially tagged Hugh Butler Lake, but is more commonly called Red Willow Reservoir after the creek that supplies its water. The 1,628-acre reservoir was the last built by the Bureau in southwestern Nebraska, joining Medicine Creek, Swanson and Enders reservoirs as flood control and irrigation projects.

Managed by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, Red Willow was soon producing some of the finest fishing in the state. It is a leading producer of Master Anger Awards for several fish species, and has long been recognized for its spunky, and chunky, largemouth bass. Its 36 miles of rugged shore, often lined with brush, helps bolster the bass fishery, while open water expanses on the lake's two arms provide white bass, wiper and walleye opportunities.

Several current and previous state record fish have been hoisted from the reservoir's waters, including both black and white crappies. Red Willow also holds the current wiper state record and likely will produce future records. To help support angler use at the lake, the Commission has installed three permanent boat ramps in the eastern portion of the reservoir, along with a fish cleaning station at the Spring Creek area of the lake.

Surrounding the reservoir are 6,000 acres of public land that are managed as state recreation and wildlife management areas. Nik Johanson recently became park superintendent at Red Willow after being assistant superintendent of Lake McConaughy.

"Our recreation areas are located



Loess hills surround Red Willow Reservoir, a scenic gem of a lake which offers excellent fishing, hunting and camping opportunities in southwestern Nebraska.

where campers may utilize modern recreational facilities. Ultra-modern camping is available at Willow View Campground, which has 50 rock-surfaced pads with 30/50-amp electrical hookups and an incredible sunset view of the lake. It also has modern restrooms, a shower house and an an easily accessible dump station. More remote locations around the reservoir offer primitive camping and have vault toilets and picnic shelters," Johanson said.

More than 4,000 acres of mixed-grass prairie surrounding the reservoir are intensely managed for wildlife. Chad Taylor, a Commission biologist stationed in Cambridge, manages wildlife lands on all southwest reservoirs. He said prairie restoration is being achieved at Red Willow using various management practices, including high intensity, moderate-duration grazing to replicate the historic processes under which the native grasses evolved. Grazing is timed to set back invasive exotics such as smooth brome, downy brome and Canada thistle and allow desirable plant species to dominate, Taylor said. Opportunities to use patch burning

and patch grazing techniques utilizing bison are also being explored.

A variety of wildlife can be seen and hunted at Red Willow, including turkey, mule and white-tailed deer, pheasant, quail and waterfowl. Visitors can also enjoy the antics of prairie dogs at two protected towns, one north of the county road near the Spring Creek arm and the other at Prairie Dog Point along the Red Willow arm.

The area's concession is located on the Spring Creek access road and offers a restaurant, camping supplies, groceries, gas, bait and tackle. Fishing, hunting and park entry permits can also be purchased there. For additional camping information, e-mail: Red.Willow@ngpc.ne.gov. ■



Red Willow Reservoir, also known as Hugh Butler Lake, is located in Frontier County, 11 miles north of McCook on U.S. Highway 83.

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This picture was taken while I was at Civilian Conservation Camp (CCC) at Hackberry Lake in Cherry County.

I think the camp was started in 1935 and then closed and moved to Bayard in 1939.

I am pictured above holding some skunks we had just dug from a den. Our trapping supervisor, Marvin West of Giltner, killed them using a stiletto-type knife and his deft touch. Later he became the lake's refuge manager.

Marvin and I were reunited on the refuge during the dedication of the "Tower Trail and Observation Deck" on the fire tower that CCC erected at Hackberry Lake.

In addition to my two years at CCC camp, I later joined the U. S. Marines and served from 1940 to 1946.

Returning to Bassett in 1946, I spent 25 years as a carpenter-contractor with my brother, Howard, as "Bennett Bros., Inc." I also served as acting postmaster, mayor and fireman. I retired from the U. S. Postal Service as a rural mail carrier in Ainsworth.

— Dallas Bennett, Bassett, Nebraska



My grandfather, Gus Viergutz (left) with Harvey Roth (center) and Ted Jockish in 1937. The hunters shot these geese on the Platte River at Viergutz's cabin near Columbus. The geese were proudly hung at Viergutz Land Company after the hunt.

— Geri Swett, Columbus, Nebraska



This is the result of a jackrabbit hunt by a group of Phelps County neighbors around 1920. Some of the men are wearing WWI army attire which helped determine the time frame. This photo is believed to have been taken at or near what is now the Funk Wildlife Management Area. Many of these hunters immigrated to the area as young men and still have descendants living in the Holdrege, Funk and Axtell areas, many of whom were involved in the identification of the hunters. They are (from left) Edolph Carlson, Elmer Gustafson, Mr. Elm, Mr. Elm, Julius Gustafson, unknown, E. Richard Larson (my great-grandfather), Carl A. Larson, Adolph Akerson, Carl Akerson and Carl Walline.

The original photo was printed in a postcard format that could be sent by mail. They probably had little idea that it would someday reach such a broad circulation, but I'm sure had they known, it would have said "Greetings from Phelps County Nebraska."

— Jeff Larson, Yankton, South Dakota

Send contributions to: Portraits from the Past, NEBRASKAland Magazine, P.O. Box 30370, Lincoln, NE 68503-0370. Photos should show people enjoying Nebraska outdoor activities, such as camping, boating, hunting or fishing, and must have been taken before 1970. 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.

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