



A Sandhills ranch road disappears into a summer thunderstorm in Grant County. Photo by Eric Fowler.

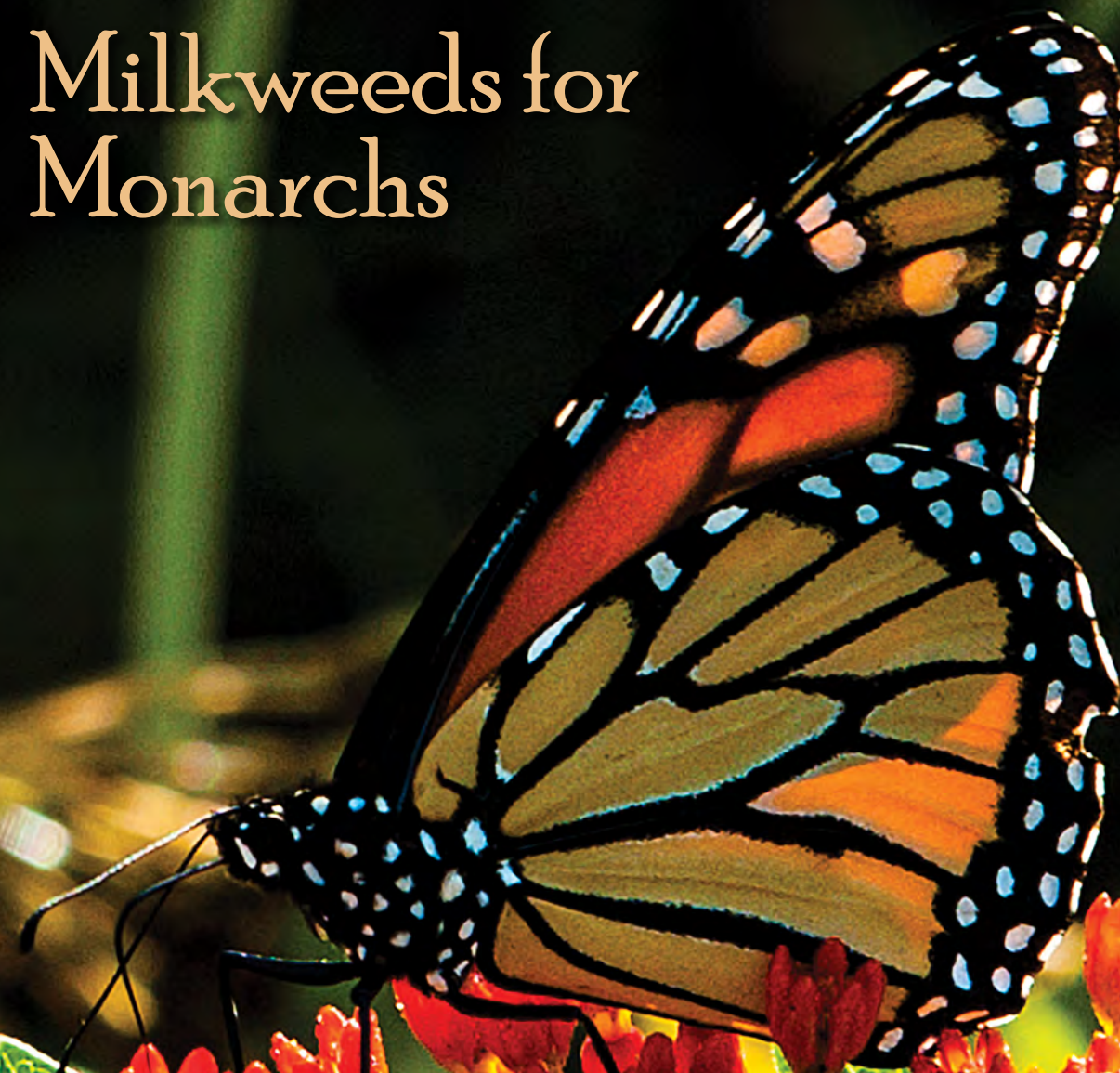
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# NEBRASKAland

July 2017

## Milkweeds for Monarchs



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INSIDE

The Ever Impressive Fort Robinson State Park  
Pure Luck Wildlife Photos • A Late Start to Fishing  
• Harold Andersen WMA • A Gathering of Cultures at Ash Hollow



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Volume 95 • No. 6 • July 2017

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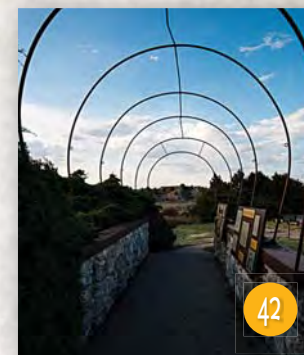
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THROUGHOUT 2017, *NEBRASKALAND MAGAZINE* WILL PUBLISH ARTICLES ASSOCIATED WITH THE STATE'S 150-YEAR CELEBRATION. LOOK FOR THIS LOGO TO READ ABOUT NEBRASKA'S RICH HISTORY AND VIEW OUR INTERACTIVE DIGITAL EDITION FOR MORE INFORMATION.

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Cover: A monarch butterfly feeds on a butterfly milkweed plant in Lancaster County. Photo by Eric Fowler.

#### Visitor

I was so happy to see this visitor on page 21. I have land in Mills, Nebraska, and a cabin. We enjoy seeing deer and turkeys at our place. Thanks again for a good magazine.

Helen Breland  
Wiggins, Mississippi

I returned to Lincoln today and was pleasantly surprised to find a package from you containing a very sporty mug, recognizing my submission of the Visitor in the May edition of *NEBRASKAland Magazine*. Thanks for the mug and your efforts in making the magazine one of the finest in the country. As a subscriber of many years the enjoyment that I receive as a reader is a monthly pleasure.

My congratulations go out to all who contribute in making your publication a success.

Thanks again,  
Frank Condello  
Lincoln, Nebraska



"After a long flight north, this male indigo bunting probably needed to stop over at the local watering hole and take a bath," said Ronald Hiatt of Bellevue. Hiatt took this photo at Fontenelle Forest in May.



A photo of Chimney Rock in Morrill County by LaVerne James of North Platte.

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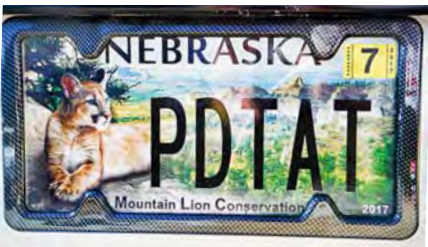
Kelly Keogh of Springview, Nebraska, calls this photo "Sandhills, the Good Life."



LaVerne James of North Platte shared this photo of a fox kit near his home.



"Lucky Catch," by Casey Mitchell, was taken near his office at Wilderness Ridge in Lincoln, Nebraska.



Outdoor Plates

Sharill Luedtke of Martell borrowed part of a line often used by Looney Tunes star Tweety Bird to personalize her Mountain Lion Conservation Plate: "I tawt I taw a puddy tat." After all ... everyone has, she said.

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



Richard Jones stitched 53 images together to create this composite of the Great Platte River Road Archway near Kearney.

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

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## A Mammal Brief

### Raccoon

By Lindsay Rogers

*Procyon lotor*

An extremely adaptable animal, the northern raccoon is native to most of North America including Canada, the United States and Mexico. They can be found in nearly any area with accessible water, but prefer wooded habitats. Due to their adaptability, raccoons are commonly found in farmland, suburban and urban habitats where they forage for human foods including agricultural crops, garbage and dog food. In non-urban areas, raccoons eat small mammals, crayfish, nuts and fruit – they are true omnivores eating nearly anything they can find. Their front paws are remarkably human-like and allow for catching prey and prying open fruits or nuts (and trash cans). Their Latin name “*lotor*” means “the washer” and refers to their well-known behavior of washing their food. Population densities vary widely depending on the habitat, but in general their numbers have risen since the turn of the century due to their ability to adapt to human habitats. ■

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



PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER

## Convergence on Sacred Ground

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## Pheasants Forever & Quail Forever Habitat Tours 2017

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

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



# Northwestern Nebraska Trails

By Justin Haag

As some travelers strive to get off the beaten path this summer, northwestern Nebraska has hundreds of miles of paths to help them do it.

The Pine Ridge region, with about 300 square miles of public land, has a seemingly endless number of trails to explore the forests, buttes, badlands and grasslands that give this region its diverse appeal.

The region has earned a recognition by numerous national publications for being a hidden jewel for horseback riders, mountain bikers and others looking for a backcountry experience. Whether trails enthusiasts enjoy exploring the countryside on rugged single-tracks, two-track pasture trails or gravel roads, they are sure to enjoy the opportunities of northwestern Nebraska.

The trails within the Pine Ridge escarpment take visitors through ponderosa pine forests, high on rocky buttes to the cold-water streams in lower elevations.

Both Fort Robinson State Park, with more than 100 miles of trails, and Chadron State Park, with another 33½, offer trails for a variety of users. Mountain bike rentals and guided



Kristen O'Brien and Alex Helmbrecht enjoy the view on top of Red Cloud Buttes at Fort Robinson State Park.

horseback rides are available at each location. In addition, the Pine Ridge Ranger District of the Nebraska National Forest has hundreds of miles of trails in Dawes County designated for both motorized and non-motorized recreational use.

Another out of the ordinary experience awaits hikers and riders in the grasslands and badlands of northern Sioux County. The Hudson-Meng Trail leads visitors between two fascinating paleontology attractions on the remote Oglala National Grassland. The three-mile journey connects the Hudson-Meng Bison Kill and Toadstool Geologic Park. In 2015, an article in *USA Today* listed it

as one of the 10 best trails in the nation for a memorable spring hike.

With a grant from the Nebraska Tourism Commission, the Dawes County Travel Board has worked with local agencies and organizations to identify a series of trail complexes with convenient loops in the region. That map and many other materials for trails enthusiasts are available at the Northwest Nebraska Visitors Center on Highway 20 in Chadron.

For those who want to do their scouting online, digital mapping resources are available. Maps of the region's public lands and trails can be found at [maps.outdoornebraska.gov](http://maps.outdoornebraska.gov), [www.fs.fed.us/visit/maps](http://www.fs.fed.us/visit/maps) and [DiscoverNWNebraska.com](http://DiscoverNWNebraska.com). ■



Dr. Jerry McLain rides a trail near The Cliffs Picnic Area southeast of Chadron.

## While in the Pine Ridge

While breaking from steps on the trails of Northwest Nebraska, take steps back in time at one of the many museums in the area.

- Crawford Historical Society Museum, Crawford
- Hudson-Meng Bison Bonebed, Crawford
- Museum of the Fur Trade, Chadron
- Mari Sandoz High Plains Heritage Center and C.F. Coffee Gallery, Chadron State College
- Dawes County Historical Museum, Chadron
- Sioux County Historical Museum, Harrison

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## A Brief History

### 1930 Roller Coaster Disaster

By the Nebraska State Historical Society

Banner newspaper headlines across Nebraska on July 25, 1930, announced a deadly roller coaster accident, the worst in American history up to that date. The mishap had occurred the evening before at Omaha's Krug Park, located at 2936 North 52nd Street, when a four-car train loaded with passengers left its track and plunged about thirty-five feet from the trestle of the "Big Dipper" roller coaster. The *Omaha World-Herald* said on July 26: "In the brief moment while the cars poised at the edge of the track, two of them dangling over the side, passengers screamed and clawed frantically at the 'safety belts' which held them to the cars."

Krug Park, established in 1895 as a beer garden by German-American Charles Tietz, was later operated by the Fred Krug Brewing Company as an amusement park. Contemporary advertisements describe it as "Omaha's Polite Resort." The *Omaha Daily Bee* on July 22, 1901, reported that 21,685 people had passed through the gates the previous day. "The only thing that kept this number from being swelled to a much larger figure was the inability of the street cars to carry more ... The dog and monkey show, with the high jumps and parachute leaps of the animals, proved as popular as ever and the shooting gallery, bowling alleys, merry-go-round and myriad other attractions were the scenes



Above: Omaha's Krug Park from a postcard mailed in 1906. Opposite: The *Omaha World-Herald* reported on the crash in its July 25, 1930, issue with photos of the damaged roller coaster.



Scene of the Krug park roller coaster disaster, which snuffed out the lives of four and injured 17 persons Thursday night. At (1) is shown the point at which the four cars plunged from the railing after proceeding up the incline on a path indicated by the arrow. At (2) is shown the resulting pileup on the tracks below. It is believed today that a nut became loose from its bolt, releasing the left brake shoe of the front car, which settled on the rail and propelled the

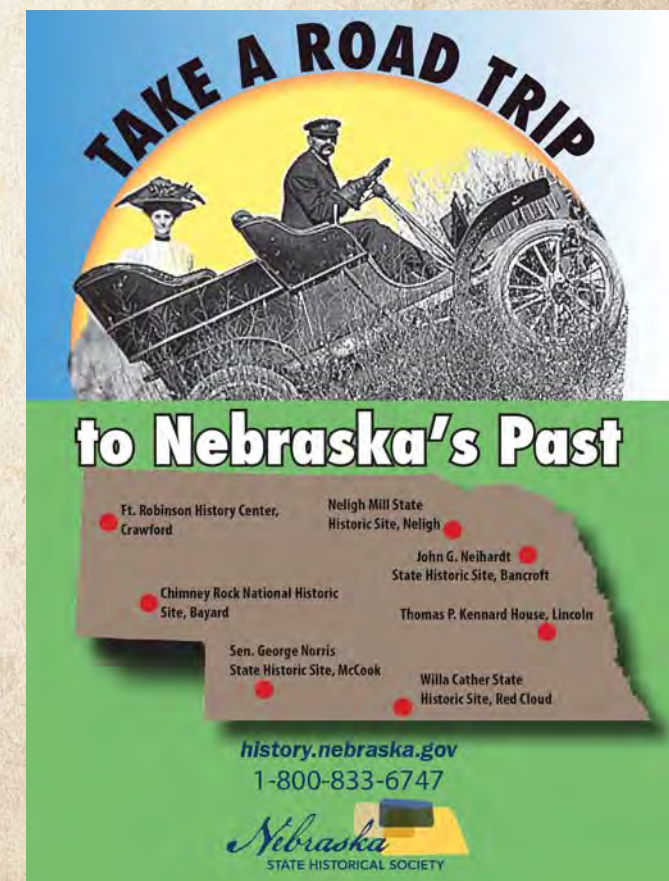
of little pleasure parties from the time the grounds opened in the morning until the gates were closed when the last cars commenced to make their way to the city."

The 1930 roller coaster mishap resulted in four deaths and many injuries, causing a near panic at the park. The *World-Herald* said on July 25: "Following the accident hysterical crowds rushed to the scene and police had to divide time between battling the crowds and aiding the injured ... The accident occurred on the Fifty-second street side of the park, three-fourths of a block north of the entrance. A crowd of curious onlookers thronged the Fifty-second street side of the park until nearly midnight. An extra detail of police were necessary to handle the dense traffic that steered toward the place when news of the tragedy spread."

Omaha officials moved speedily to determine the cause of the accident. City Commissioner John Hopkins, who surveyed the scene, told the *World-Herald* that there had evidently been some object on the track that derailed the first car. It was later reported in the press that the accident was caused by a loose bolt on a brake shoe. The brake shoe fell under one of the front wheels. This derailed the first car, which then pulled the other three with it. Three of the cars overturned, pinning most of the occupants beneath them. The unconscious victims were pulled from the wreckage and taken to hospitals in private cars before ambulances arrived.

Following the accident, Krug Park was closed for the evening at the suggestion of Commissioner Hopkins but reopened the next day, except for the roller coaster. Business declined, however, and the park was closed for good in 1940. ■

Visit the Nebraska State Historical Society's website at [nebraskahistory.org](http://nebraskahistory.org).



## Loaner Bikes at Fort Kearny SRA

By Julie Geiser

Lois and Jodie Bruning have been campground hosts for five years at the Fort Kearny State Recreation Area. During this time, they have often noticed kids who forgot their bikes or had flat tires, and as a result missed out on the chance to ride around the park and down the newly finished hike/bike trail.

Since 2014, the Brunings have loaned bikes to anyone who wants to ride. The bikes are available on the honor system and people can simply stop by their camper and take a bike for a spin – all they ask is that the bikes are returned when people are done using them.

The Brunings offer 80-plus bikes in an assortment of colors, sizes and brands; they even have some with training wheels, along with scooters and mountain bikes.

Most of the bikes were purchased by Lois from an online garage sale site. The bikes are maintained by Jodie in an attachment he made for the back of their camper. In the winter months the bikes are stored at the couple's farm, where Jodie gives each a tune-up before the busy summer season.

This program is unique to Fort Kearny and is completely funded and run by the Brunings. The program is a great asset to the SRA and those who just want to ride. ■



PHOTO BY JULIE GEISER

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## Wild Edibles – Purslane

By Julie Geiser

My favorite wild edible is purslane (*Portulaca oleracea*). I admire its taste, texture, nutritional value and many different uses, and I cannot wait for this succulent crop to sprout every year. However, purslane is often sprayed or pulled, as it is misunderstood as an unwanted weed that will spread and take over an area throughout the summer months. You can find it growing rampantly in lawns, cracks in city sidewalks, roadsides, and vacant lots or crop fields.

The leaves, stems, flowers and seeds are all edible and can be used many different ways. I love to pick the leaves and stems directly from the plant and eat them, knowing that these plants growing in my yard are free of pesticides. However, always wash plants before use. Their flavor is similar to watercress – slightly lemony and crunchy – and the leaves and stems are great in place of lettuce or pickles in a sandwich. Leaves, stems and flowers can be eaten raw in salads and smoothies or sautéed in oil and used as a side dish. They are also delicious in a stir fry mixed with other vegetables and rice or used in casseroles and soups.

Young plants start to appear in June, and by July, they are readily available and will begin flowering. Purslane is a hardy, annual herb with numerous branches originating from a central root. The branches and leaves are smooth, fleshy and sometimes have a red or purple tinge to them. Leaves resemble a small jade plant and are flat, oval and are nearly opposite to randomly arranged on the branches. The flowers are small and yellow, and they typically open in the

mornings when there is sunshine. The plant's seeds are small and contained in a capsule that opens into two parts. The seeds and loose stems will reproduce a new plant; the seeds can live up to 40 years in the ground and withstand extreme cold temperatures.

If you wish to save the seeds, the plant can be seeded indoors in the spring to get a jump-start on the growing season. Purslane can also be transplanted and grown indoors for a month or so after the summer growing season.

Purslane does have a poisonous look-alike called hairy-stemmed spurge (*Euphorbia vermiculata*), but it is easy to distinguish the two plants. Hairy-stemmed spurge has a milky sap that can be seen if you cut or snap the stem in two.

Purslane has been dated back to prehistoric times, and in many parts of the world today, it is grown in gardens as a valuable food source. It contains more omega-3 in its leafy greens than eating fish or taking supplements, and it is also full of other vitamins and minerals. Purslane's other health benefits include stimulating blood circulation, protecting against osteoporosis, lowering bad cholesterol levels, and preventing macular degeneration, cataracts and some cancers.

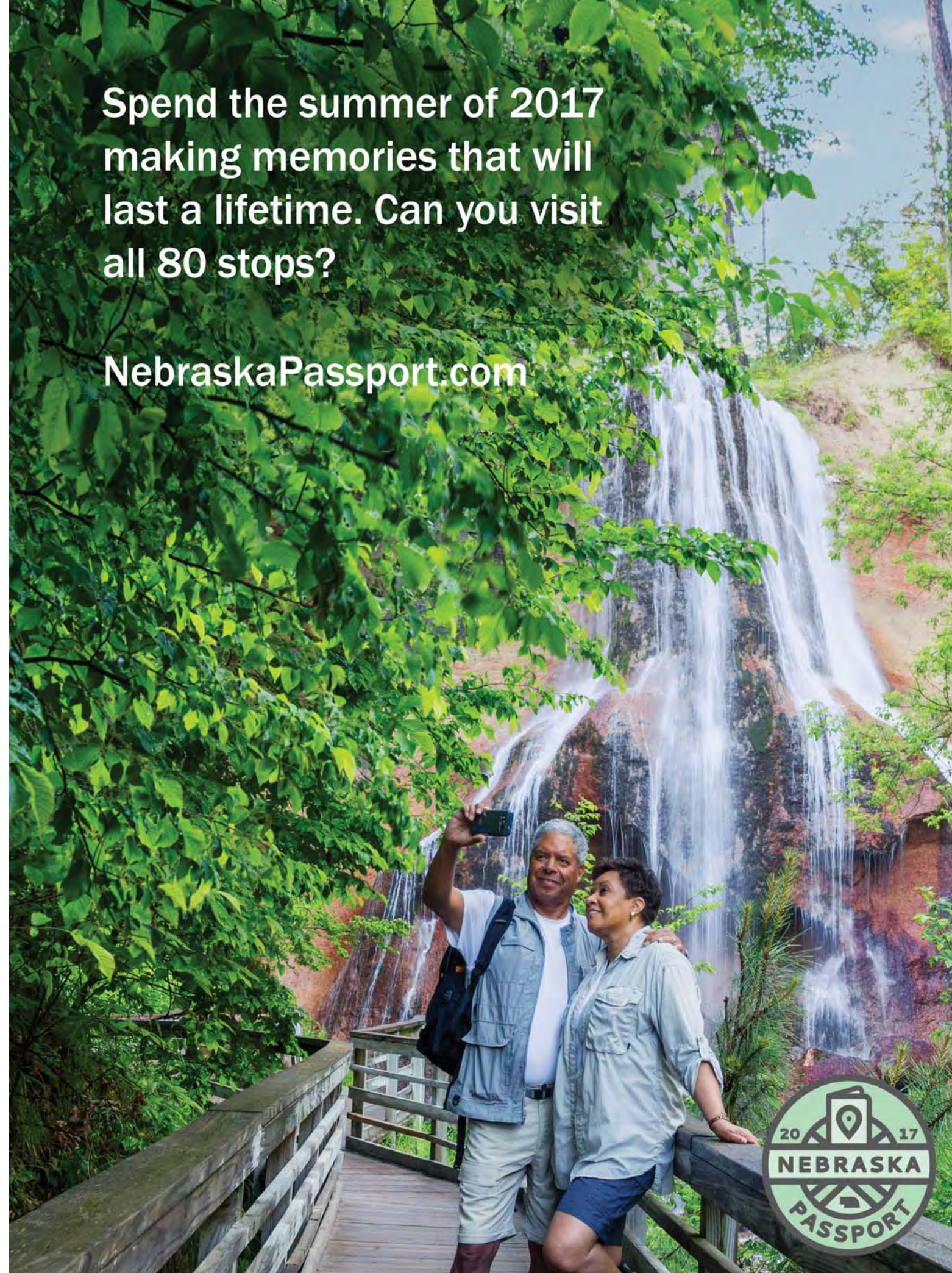
The only downside of purslane is that it contains oxalic acid, which may cause the formation of kidney stones. If you have problems with kidney stones, check with a doctor before consuming. However, boiling purslane in water eliminates much of the oxalic acid without losing other nutrients. Before eating any plant, make sure to positively identify it and do your research. ■



Purslane has numerous branches originating from a central root. By July the plant will take over the area where it is growing. Resembling a small jade plant, purslane is delicious alone or with vegetables and rice or used in casseroles and soups.

Spend the summer of 2017  
making memories that will  
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all 80 stops?

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## Backyard Monarchs

By Kristal Stoner

Typically monarch butterflies arrive in Nebraska from farther south in early June. The first generation of butterflies to leave Mexico likely stop in Texas or Oklahoma to lay eggs, and we see the second generation in Nebraska. The monarchs in our backyards and fields are looking for food both for their young and themselves. Monarch caterpillars are specialists and feed only on milkweed, so adult females will seek out one of the species of milkweed found in Nebraska. Common, swamp, whorled and showy milkweed are some of the best for monarch caterpillars. Adult monarchs are generalists, so they look for nectar from a variety of blooming flowers.

You can create monarch habitat in your own backyard. Monarchs thrive and reproduce in an area as small as a 10-square-foot plot. Monarchs breed in Nebraska all summer and go through several generations, so to support the entire life cycle, they need both milkweed and a variety of flowers, preferably native, that bloom from spring until fall. Visit [OutdoorNebraska.org/monarch](http://OutdoorNebraska.org/monarch) for a plant list for monarch gardens to take to your local nursery. Visit the website [Journey North at learner.org/jnorth](http://JourneyNorth.org) to track the monarch migration each year. ■



PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS

## 150 Years Of Nebraska Storytelling

Ponca State Park, August 6 - 8

Celebrate Nebraska's history and culture through literature and the art of storytelling.

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## Poolside – State Park Style

By Jeff Kurrus

Being the hottest month of the year in Nebraska, there is no better place to be than poolside. And there are no better places to do this than at a number of Nebraska's state parks. Here is our list:

### Chadron State Park

For visitors who like scenery as they swim, they will be hard-pressed to find a better location than Chadron State Park. The spacious outdoor pool overlooks the picturesque Pine Ridge. As a bonus, the bath houses were renovated in 2016.

### Eugene T. Mahoney State Park

This aquatic center boasts a zero entry wave pool, two waterslides, and other water-based activities for all ages. For smaller crowds, visit from 6-8 p.m. during the weekdays.

### Niobrara State Park

Conveniently located near the park's cabins, Niobrara State Park's swimming pool offers visitors a way to cool down in the summer-time heat. This modern pool is handicapped accessible by a recently installed pool lift.

### Ponca State Park

Suitable for swimmers of all ages, Ponca's new aquatic center features a heated zero-depth entry pool, 172-foot long water slide, climbing wall, diving board, and spray features for small children. Older swimmers may enjoy pool games such as basketball and volleyball. The bathhouse offers a concession area for all park visitors.

### Fort Robinson State Park

Rain or shine, the indoor Olympic-sized Lindeken Pool at Fort Robinson State Park is popular among visitors. In addition, the outdoor wading pool and deck caters to sun-worshippers and the youngest of water-lovers.

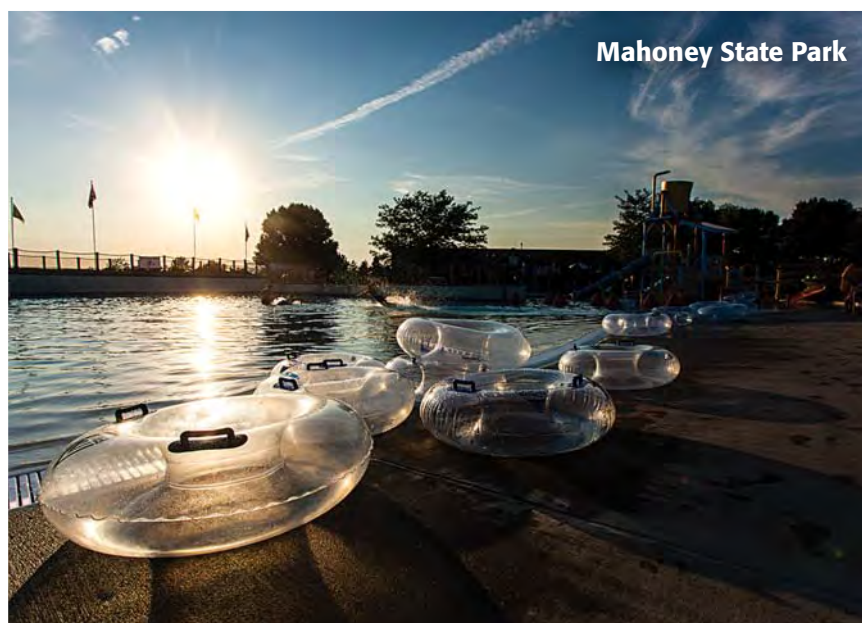
### Platte River State Park

This small pool offers families a quiet setting between the towns of Louisville and South Bend off of Highway 66. Once you're done visiting the pool, take the little ones down to Crawdad Creek at the upper end of Jenny Newman Lake for more water-related fun. ■



Chadron State Park

PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER



Mahoney State Park

PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS



Ponca State Park

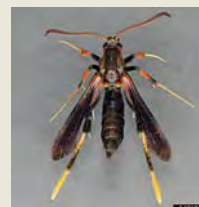
PHOTO BY JEFF FIELDS

## When It is Not an Emerald Ash Borer...

By Julie Van Meter  
State Entomologist, Nebraska  
Department of Agriculture

The exotic, invasive **emerald ash borer** (*Agrilus planipennis*), or EAB, was found infesting ash trees in Nebraska in 2016. However, a number of native borers infest ash trees, too, and treatment needs differ depending on pest species. Trees decline for many reasons, and symptoms of decline are similar for most pests. It is important to correctly diagnosis the pest before making management decisions.

One of the most common borers of ash is the native **ash-lilac borer** (*Podosesia syringae*), which infests both ash trees (*Fraxinus spp.*) and lilac bushes (*Syringa spp.*). This insect is



MARK DREILING, BUGWOOD.ORG

a clearwing moth, not a beetle, and the adult is often confused for a wasp. Larvae are round and white, feeding under the bark then tunneling into the sapwood, unlike EAB larvae that remain just under the bark.

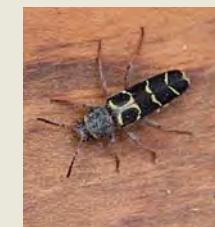
The exit holes of the ash-lilac borer adults are round and ¼ inch in diameter, much larger than EAB's ⅛-inch D-shaped exit holes. The adult moth will often leave its pupal skin stuck in the exit hole as it leaves the tree. The **banded ash clearwing** (*Podosesia aureocincta*) is a closely related insect. However, these adults emerge in the fall, while ash-lilac borer adults emerge in spring.

Several round-headed borers are known to infest ash trees, including the redheaded ash borer (*Neoclytus acuminatus*) and the banded ash borer (*Neoclytus caprea*). The adult

**redheaded ash borer** is ½ inch in length and has a burnt reddish color with distinct yellow lines across its back. Adults emerge in the spring and lay eggs in bark cracks.

The life cycle of the **banded ash borer** is very similar; however, the adult beetles are darker in color, with shorter legs than the redheaded ash borer, and have whitish bands instead of yellow. Larvae of both species feed under the bark before moving into the sapwood. The adult exit holes of these borers are round and larger than EAB exit holes.

Remember, not all borers are EAB, and effective management requires accurate diagnosis. ■



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WHITNEY CRANSHAW, BUGWOOD.ORG

**YOU NEVER KNOW WHAT IS LURKING IN YOUR FIREWOOD**

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

**PREVENTION IS KEY:**

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

**BUY LOCAL, BURN LOCAL.**

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

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## Upcoming Events by Jerry Kane

**July 1**  
**Archery Fishing**  
Archery fishing of game fish is allowed statewide through Dec. 31

**July 1**  
**Spearfishing**  
Underwater spearfishing of game fish allowed in specific waters through Dec. 31 (see page 19 of 2017 Fishing Guide)

**July 1**  
**Rimfire Steel Plate Challenge**  
Platte River State Park (SP), Louisville

**July 1-2**  
**Living History**  
Fort Atkinson State Historical Park (SHP), Fort Calhoun

**July 1-2, 4**  
**Living History**  
Fort Kearny SHP, Kearney

**July 1-4**  
**Western and Wildlife Art Show**  
Fort Robinson SP, Crawford

**July 1-14**  
**Paddlefish**  
Paddlefish snagging permit application period

**July 1, 8, 15, 22, 29**  
**Buffalo Steak Night and Free Movie**  
Platte River SP, Louisville

**July 2**  
**Sidewalk Chalk Art**  
Niobrara SP, Niobrara

**July 4**  
**Fourth of July Barbecue**  
Fort Robinson SP, Crawford

**July 5, 19**  
**Family Fun Night**  
Red Willow Reservoir State Recreation Area (SRA), McCook

**July 7**  
**Lottery Permits**  
Final day to apply for Nebraska Super Tag and Combo lottery permits

**July 8**  
**Bighorn Sheep Hike**  
Wildcat Hills SRA, Gering

**July 9**  
**Family Fishing Event**  
Riverside Discovery Center Pond, Scottsbluff

**July 10**  
**Big Game Permits**  
Remaining big game hunting permits may be purchased, beginning at 1 p.m. Central Time, through the close of the seasons

**July 10-31**  
**Deer Hunting Application**  
Application period for Gifford Point WMA special access permits for deer hunting

**July 11**  
**Family Fishing Event**  
Oak Lake, Lincoln

**July 11**  
**Monarch Monitoring Project**  
Nebraska Game and Parks Northeast District Office, Norfolk

**July 12**  
**State 4-H Camp**  
Calamus Reservoir SRA, Burwell

**July 13**  
**Family Fishing Event**  
Lake Halleck, Papillion

**July 14**  
**Family Fishing Event**  
City Park, Holdrege

**July 15**  
**Carp-O-Rama**  
Lake Maloney SRA, North Platte

**July 15**  
**Prairie Grass Hike**  
Rock Creek Station SHP, Fairbury

**July 15**  
**Beyond BOW Niobrara and Missouri River Kayaking Trip**  
Niobrara SP, Niobrara

**July 15**  
**Ranch Life in the 1860s**  
Rock Creek Station SHP, Fairbury

**July 15**  
**Kite Day Walk**  
Niobrara SP, Niobrara

**July 15**  
**Geocaching**  
Niobrara SP, Niobrara

**July 15**  
**Republican Valley Archery 3-D Shoot**  
Red Willow Reservoir SRA, McCook

**July 18**  
**Family Fishing Event**  
Lake Zorinsky, Omaha

**July 19**  
**Family Fishing Event**  
Bowling Lake, Lincoln

**July 20**  
**Family Fishing Event**  
Skyview Lake, Norfolk

**July 21**  
**BASS State High School Fishing Tournament**  
Merritt Reservoir SRA, Valentine

**July 21-23**  
**Convergence on Sacred Ground**  
Ash Hollow SHP, Lewellen

**July 22**  
**TBF SAF State High School Fishing Tournament**  
Merritt Reservoir SRA, Valentine

Contact the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission at 402-471-0641 or visit [OutdoorNebraska.org](http://OutdoorNebraska.org) for more information. Visit [HuntSafeNebraska.org](http://HuntSafeNebraska.org) for a list of hunter education classes and [BoatSafeNebraska.org](http://BoatSafeNebraska.org) for a list of boating safety classes.



The wranglers of Fort Robinson State Park make their way along the parade route during the annual Crawford Fourth of July celebration

**July 22**  
**Beyond BOW Native Plants and Uses Event**  
Fort Hartsuff SHP, Burwell

**July 25-27**  
**Wilderness Awareness Camp**  
Nebraska Game and Parks Outdoor Education Center, Lincoln

**July 27**  
**Family Fishing Event**  
Benson Park, Omaha

**July 28**  
**Family Fishing Event**  
Melham Park, Broken Bow

**July 29**  
**Campfire Christmas in July**  
Indian Cave SP, Shubert

**July 29**  
**Jingle Bell Junk and Craft Market**  
Indian Cave SP, Shubert

Beyond BOW kayakers prepare to paddle under the Chief Standing Bear Memorial Bridge on the Missouri River.



## A Camp out Isn't Complete Without...

### From Facebook

We posed this question on the Nebraska Game and Parks Facebook page, and were given a number of answers that only furthered our desire to be outdoors this summer. Here are a few of those responses:

"S'mores!" – Joe Holstedt  
"Stargazing!" – Bobbi Holm  
"Mosquitos." – Milton A. Gabriel  
"Friends, Fire, Stars." – Zach Hanson  
"A good strong campfire, with plenty of coals in the morning to build back up and make breakfast with." – Nick Fritsch  
"Family." – Ben Collingham  
"Prairie." – Benjamin Vogt  
"Ticks." – Tom Lynch  
"A cooler on wheels." – Chris McKay  
"Starry nights and a hammock!" – Mary Gallagher  
"Campfire." – Katrina Lynne  
"Family, friends, and being able to relax and enjoy." – Carol Kohn  
"Comfortable lounge chairs!" – Jason Ratkovec  
"Fishing for dinner." – Duane Long  
"Marshmallows." – Robbi Gould  
"Peace and quiet. Solitude." – Stephanie Voge Brown  
"The sound of crickets." – Cindy Frost  
"Bug spray." – Patty Burke  
"Good friends and family, kids exploring and s'mores." – Karen Kader  
"Me." – Brad Cyriacks ■



## NEBRASKAland Visitor



Last issue's winner of the Visitor drawing was Leo Turner of Lisco, Nebraska, who found the **pine sawyer beetle** on page 21.

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

To enter each month, write:  
**NEBRASKAland Visitor**  
**2200 North 33rd Street**  
**Lincoln, NE 68503**

Or e-mail: [Tim.Reigert@Nebraska.gov](mailto:Tim.Reigert@Nebraska.gov) with "Visitor" in the subject line of the message.

HINT: This issue's visitor is not on page 15, 18, 21, 23, 35, 41, 52, 58 or 71.

Several species of **pine sawyer beetles** (*Monochamus* spp.), including the **white spotted, northern, and Carolina**, are found infesting dead and dying conifers across Nebraska. These longhorn beetles range in body length from about 0.75-1.5 inches, with antennae longer than their body. Female beetles lay eggs in a niche they chew into the bark of the tree. Larvae are legless, roundheaded borers and feed under the bark and into the sap- and heartwood, creating tunnels filled with coarse frass. It is possible to hear the larvae feeding under the bark. Eventually mature larvae pupate and adult beetles emerge from the tree, leaving round exit holes. Adults, which can be found spring through fall, will then feed on bark and evergreen needles, but they cause little damage.

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



Families fish at the annual Carp-O-Rama event at Lake Maloney State Recreation Area in North Platte.

# Fort Robinson State Park

## The Ever Impressive

*Story and photos by Justin Haag*

*For almost as long as Nebraska has been a state, there has been a Fort Robinson. The fort's scenic grounds have had many uses on their way to becoming the popular vacation getaway of today.*



Trail rides are a favorite activity at the Fort. A wrangler leads this group near Red Cloud Buttes.

It does not take long for a visitor of Fort Robinson State Park to fall in love with the place. Even the locals seem never to become weary of spending time at northwestern Nebraska's flagship attraction, with activities as diverse as its expansive, beautiful landscape. One observation penned by a newspaper editor surely had it right:

"No visitor or tourist in that vicinity neglects the opportunity of viewing and enjoying an afternoon at the Fort. Filled with sights so interesting and history so thrilling that the same never grows old or tiresome to the most familiar." Such praise has become common enough for Fort Robinson that the editor's remark may seem trite. Extraordinary, though, is that the sentiments were written in 1907, 110 years ago and just a few decades after the U.S Cavalry first set up camp in

this northwestern Nebraska setting. From the beginning, visitors have recognized Fort Robinson, with its pine-studded buttes rising above sweeping grasslands at the confluence of two coldwater streams, as a special place. As time goes on, those attributes seem only to gain value. Throughout almost all of Nebraska's 150 years of statehood, Fort Robinson has been making history, compiling a story as rich as that of any other Nebraska attraction. As Nebraska's largest state park, the fort continues to offer a wide range of experiences sure to be memorable for visitors of all ages and interests. While history remains a big part of the fort's appeal, much of its reputation now centers on fun. It has become the choice destination for families wanting to experience a vacation rich with horseback riding, swimming,



A mountain bluebird lands on a sunflower stalk near Cherry Creek Pond. Fort Robinson State Park abounds with birds and wildlife viewing opportunities.



Carter P. Johnson Lake often attracts anglers and other visitors with small watercraft.

camping, fishing, hiking, biking, hayrack rides, cookouts, floating the river, watching a Broadway show or just hanging out in a scenic place. Fort Robinson is always sure to impress.

## An Evolving Mission

Fort Robinson State Park has its roots in the U.S. military, dating back to the 1870s and running up to the mid-20th century. Historians regard it as one of the most significant destinations for reliving the days of the U.S. Cavalry, the Indian wars and Euro-American settlement of the West.

Camp Robinson, as the military first named the outpost, was established

in 1874 to provide security for the Red Cloud Agency. The agency was one in a series of such sites the U.S. Government established to distribute materials promised to displaced Native Americans by treaty. In 1878, the name changed to Fort Robinson, signifying a more permanent existence. The U.S. military retained a presence there throughout World War II, using the site for an evolving set of roles.

Certainly, history has not looked favorably on all of Fort Robinson's years – most notably the early conflicts between the cavalry and the Indians. The most notorious event to happen at Fort Robinson was the Cheyenne Outbreak. During that episode of almost three months in 1878-1879, the army captured a band of 149 Northern

Cheyenne Indians led by Chief Dull Knife south of Chadron and detained them in barracks at the fort. The group had escaped reservation lands in present-day Oklahoma and was enroute to their homeland on the northern Plains. The situation became dire as officials in Washington insisted that the group return south, as the Indians were just as insistent on moving north. In an act of persuasion, the army barred the windows of the barracks and refused the Cheyennes food and fuel. On a freezing January night, the Cheyennes shot the guards with weapons they had hidden and escaped from the barracks. Several conflicts ensued in the buttes and grasslands west and north of the fort, resulting in the death of 64 of the Indians and 11 soldiers. Most of the



Located near Crawford with 22,000 acres straddling the border of Dawes and Sioux counties, Fort Robinson is Nebraska's largest and westernmost state park.

surviving Indians were recaptured. Camp Robinson was also the site of the 1877 killing of Oglala Sioux leader Crazy Horse. He surrendered to U.S. troops in May 1877 at the end of the Great Sioux War and was killed



The park rodeo, which features park employees and others from the surrounding community, entertains visitors each Thursday night during the summer.



Park visitors cool off and enjoy the swimming pool, while others embark on a stagecoach ride – a longtime popular attraction.



on Sept. 5. The Sioux leader had been falsely accused of threatening to kill an army general, and a cavalry soldier fatally stabbed him with a bayonet as he resisted arrest.

Fort Robinson would later become the home of the Ninth and Tenth Cavalry, the all-black regiments dubbed “buffalo soldiers” by the Plains Indians. Between 1885 and 1907, most of the soldiers at the fort were African-American.

As time went on, the United States’

conflicts shifted to enemies outside its borders and fewer troops were needed on the Plains. The fort shifted gears again and became a quartermaster remount depot, charged with training and breeding horses and mules for the military. The fort gained a reputation as the nation’s largest and best such facility, and the soldiers there boasted of being the world’s finest horsemen. In the 1930s, the U.S. Olympic equestrian team even trained at the fort.

Its final significant roles with the military came during World War II as a training center for the U.S. K-9 corps, which readied dogs for use in battle, and a German prisoner of war camp. The K-9 training area housed 1,800 dogs as they became guards, scouts, messengers and sled-pullers. About 5,000 dogs, half the number used during WWII, received training there. The POW camp was designed to hold 3,000 men, and its population primarily consisted of German soldiers in the Afrika Korps. The prisoners worked on area farms, earning a wage set by the Geneva Convention. Some even stayed in the area after the war was over.

In 1947, the U.S. military abandoned the fort. It was later transferred to the U.S. Department of Agriculture for use as a beef research station. In 1953, 90 buildings were considered dilapidated beyond repair, labeled surplus and demolished. The research station later moved to the old Naval Ammunition Depot at Hastings, making way for the fort’s present role.

The fort’s latest chapter began in the early 1960s when the Nebraska Game, Forestation and Parks Commission – one of the Game and Parks Commission’s previous names – obtained a 75-acre parcel of land within the current park’s boundaries. The federal government deeded over much of the fort’s land to the Commission in 1964, and the addition of the James Ranch in 1972 created the park’s expansive 22,000-acre complex.

## Family Time

Ever since the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission assumed ownership of Fort Robinson, visitors have considered it a jewel of the state park system.

With its many lodging options and diverse activities for all ages, Fort Robinson has become a popular place to gather with family and friends. As one example of its prominence, USA Today listed it as one of the best places to have a family reunion.

Most visitors begin their Fort Robinson experience at the lodge, with its information booth, permit sales, full-service restaurant, gift shop and hotel style lodging. The stately building, which serves as the park’s headquarters, was constructed in 1909 as barracks.

Many of the fort’s original officers’ quarters now serve as lodging, while other buildings have been modernized to serve various purposes. Because the buildings were constructed in varying sizes during separate eras of construction, groups as small as two and as large as 60 people can gather under one roof.

Even the 500-square-foot duplex officers’ quarters made of adobe bricks and covered with wood siding during the fort’s earliest days are among the lodging available to visitors. Families often gather in “the bricks,” “the adobes” and Comanche Hall, the buildings adorning the north and west sides of the park’s horseshoe drive.

Modern construction at the fort

appropriately blends with the park’s historical appeal. In 2015, the fort welcomed a reconstruction modeled after officers quarters originally built in 1891, an impressive blend of modern amenities in a historical package. The Buffalo Soldiers Barracks was reconstructed by the park at the turn of the 21st century to serve as the primary space for large meetings, wedding receptions and other group events. Included among them is the fort’s

annual Historical Christmas Dinner, in which attendees dine from a menu replicated from the fort’s military days while dressed in period attire.

Fort Robinson’s campgrounds also feature variety. Travelers will find sites ranging from full RV hook-ups to primitive tent sites. Most of the sites are spacious with shade, some situated right along Soldier Creek.

Visitors looking to cool off will enjoy the indoor Olympic-size swimming



A dancer’s headwear stands out against the sunset during the Fort Robinson Intertribal Powwow.

## The Fort’s Many Roles

- 1873:** Red Cloud Agency moved from North Platte River to White River near Crawford.
- 1874:** Camp Robinson established to provide security at Red Cloud Agency
- 1877:** Crazy Horse killed at Camp Robinson
- 1878:** Camp Robinson named Fort Robinson, indicating permanent status.
- 1879:** Cheyenne Outbreak
- 1885:** 9th Cavalry Regiment, known as the Buffalo Soldiers, stationed at Fort Robinson
- 1919:** Fort Robinson becomes Quartermaster Remount Depot
- 1942:** K-9 Training Center established
- 1943:** German POW Camp established
- 1949:** USDA Beef Research Station opens
- 1962:** Fort Robinson becomes Fort Robinson State Park
- 1972:** James Ranch acquired, boosting park’s size to 22,000 acres



A jeep makes its way down the trail after visiting the Cheyenne Buttes.

pool, a float down the White River on rented tubes or kayaks, or a cold snack from the Sutler’s Store activities center.

Top-notch entertainment is offered during matinees and evening performances at the Post Playhouse, the highly acclaimed and independently operated summer repertory theatre featuring popular Broadway musicals with professional actors. The playhouse is celebrating its 50th anniversary

this year and has many special events scheduled to mark the occasion.

## Horses, of Course

Visitors to Fort Robinson soon realize they are in horse country. A sign at the entrance of the headquarters evokes visions of the park’s history as a cavalry post and remount station: “Through These Portals Passed the



Pronghorn (*Antilocapra americana*) run below the scenic buttes at Fort Robinson State Park.

World’s Finest Horsemen.”

Horsemen and horsewomen of all skill levels revel in a landscape fit for a Western movie while the park offers opportunities for riders of various skills.

Riders who bring their own horses can use marked trails or venture off the beaten path to explore the area. Annual gatherings of horse enthusiasts, such as the American Paint Horse Association, have bolstered the park’s reputation as first-rate riding ground.

No special permission is required to ride at Fort Robinson, but a few rules have been established. To ensure park safety and cleanliness, no riding is allowed near lodging or camping areas. Private horses also are not allowed on the two trail ride routes while park rides are in session. Overnight guests with horses must rent a stall, but the barn’s location near a campground specially designed for equestrian

visitors and other lodging ensures that animals will be nearby.

Also adding to the park’s Wild West appeal are weekly rodeos to entertain visitors during the summer. There are also horse-drawn wagon tours, rides on a vintage stagecoach, hayrack breakfast rides and chuck wagon dinners.

## Getting Around the Park

If horses are not your preferred mode of travel, there are plenty of other ways to take in the park’s sights. A guided jeep tour, for instance, takes visitors to the top of the Cheyenne Buttes for an amazing view of the park below.

With more than 100 miles of trails, Fort Robinson is popular among hikers, mountain bikers and cross country skiers. Mountain bike rentals are

available at the park’s activities center for those wanting to explore the area.

Well-maintained paved and gravel roads course through the acreage. A favorite drive within the park is Smiley Canyon, which once served as the main highway between Harrison and Crawford. Once the site of many accidents, the road was greatly improved in the 1950s.

## A Wild Park

At more than 34 square miles, Fort Robinson features plenty of room for the animals to roam, regardless of their size. No other Nebraska park features such diversity in big animals exemplifying the spirit of the wild.

High in the buttes reside Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep while herds of pronghorn, American bison and longhorn cattle graze among the

grasslands below. Even elk occasionally enter the park, which is also home to both mule deer and whitetails.

The park also features many smaller wild mammals and offers outstanding birdwatching opportunities. Even casual observers have strong chances of spotting golden eagles, wild turkeys, prairie falcons and sharp-tailed grouse. Of course, the park also is home to many smaller avian species, such as rock wrens in the upper elevations and Bullock’s orioles and lazuli buntings near the creeks. Woodpeckers and other cavity nesters have taken a liking to the areas burned by wildfire.

## Hunting and Angling

Records from the cavalry days indicate that Fort Robinson has long



An adult bison grazes with a calf along Smiley Canyon Drive.

enticed anglers. Numerous small ponds complement the coldwater streams of the park, providing ample fishing.

Multispecies anglers target Carter P. Johnson Lake, Grabel Ponds, Ice House Ponds and Cherry Creek Pond for crappies, bluegills, catfish, rock bass and trophy largemouth bass. “Carter P.,” as the locals call it, is nearly the perfect size for small watercraft, such as a kayak. Others are small enough to be thoroughly fished from the bank.

Both Soldier Creek and the White

River have populations of trout, primarily in areas upstream from the fort in the Soldier Creek Wilderness Area or sites along the White accessible through the Open Fields and Waters program. From these waters anglers can harvest a Nebraska “grand slam” of trout. All of the state’s trout species – rainbows, brooks, browns, tigers and cutthroats – swim in the park or near it.

Fort Robinson also has long been a popular base camp for hunters. Its lodging units open for hunters

pursuing turkeys in the spring and stay open through firearm deer season in the fall. A sizable portion of the fort is open to hunting, and a wealth of public lands located nearby are open to pursuing game. Within a short drive are Petersen, Ponderosa, Gilbert-Baker, and Bighorn wildlife management areas, in addition to thousands of acres managed by the U.S. National Forests and Grasslands.

## Back to History

To realize the importance of Fort Robinson’s history, one only needs to count historical markers throughout the park. There are 16 of them, the most of any single Nebraska attraction.

Thanks to help from partner organizations, Fort Robinson State Park features numerous resources for history buffs. Although many of its buildings have been removed through the years, dozens remain standing to make the attraction unique among most other abandoned cavalry forts. At most other such forts, buildings have long since been demolished.

Since 1956, during the fort’s days as a beef research center, the Nebraska State Historical Society has operated the Fort Robinson Museum and History Center. It is housed in one of the fort’s former post headquarters, constructed in 1905. Centrally located and packed with exhibits, the museum is the recommended first stop for visitors wanting to step back in time while touring the historical grounds.

The historical society also operates a reconstruction of the 1874 cavalry barracks at the location of the Cheyenne Outbreak’s beginning. One of the 1887 adobe barracks also has been furnished with historical items and serves as an interpretive site. In all, the historical society operates about a dozen restored or reconstructed buildings that are often open to help visitors relive the past, complementing about 65 buildings operated by Game and Parks.

Another facility on site, the Trailside Museum of Natural History, takes visitors even further back in time. Operated in the old post gymnasium by the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, it tells of the region’s rich resources in paleontology and geology. It features the Clash of the Mammoths,



Aaron Schrotberger of Sidney casts a fly rod during an early morning fishing trip to Grabel Ponds.



A full moon hangs behind the water towers at Fort Robinson State Park.

a fossil display of two bull Columbian mammoths that battled and died north of Crawford with their tusks locked together. A full-size mammoth skeleton stands in the center of the building, towering over visitors and exhibits.

## Still an Attraction

Fort Robinson continues to make history, these days by attracting thousands of visitors from near and far. In addition to Fort Robinson, nearby Crawford and the numerous visitor attractions in the Pine Ridge area make the park a premier summer destination, and there are always sights to see throughout the winter, as well.

Just as that newspaper editor wrote in 1907, an afternoon at “the fort” will never grow old or tiresome. With almost 150 years to prove it, one can bet that statement will be true for whatever

## Want More History?

Books written by the late Thomas R. Buecker served as valuable resources for this article. Buecker, the long-time curator of the Fort Robinson State Historical Museum and History Center who died in 2015, developed a legacy as an authority of the fort with his books, *Fort Robinson and the American West 1874-1889* and *Fort Robinson and the American Century 1900-1948*. The books, along with a self-guided driving tour manual for the fort and many other historical resources, are available for purchase at the fort’s headquarters, the historical museum or online at [history.nebraska.gov](http://history.nebraska.gov).

birthday Nebraska is celebrating. ■

To learn more about Fort Robinson, visit the web at [OutdoorNebraska.org/fortrobinson](http://OutdoorNebraska.org/fortrobinson) and [postplayhouse.com](http://postplayhouse.com). For information about Nebraska’s

Sesquicentennial, including programs, projects, and events celebrating Nebraska’s 150 years of statehood, visit [ne150.org](http://ne150.org).



# Time Well Spent

## What to Do in July

By Renae Blum

July is Nebraska's hottest month. The temptation may be to stay inside and bask in the air conditioning, but braving the heat can lead to some of summer's sweetest rewards. Read on for a few ideas to get started. For a full list of events across the state, or for more information on events listed here, visit [OutdoorNebraska.org](http://OutdoorNebraska.org). ■



PHOTO BY JEFF KURRIUS

### Get Ready for Fall Hunting

#### Throughout the month

#### Statewide

Opening day will be here before you know it, so take a little time each week to make sure you're ready. To get in shape, start taking walks and increase your distance as your body allows. If a four-legged friend will be with you on your hunts, bring this partner along as well. It's also a good time to return to the archery range, as bow season for deer begins Aug. 1. In addition, take inventory of the ammunition you'll need through the season and start looking for sale items in stores.



PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER

### Fish for White Bass and Wipers

#### Throughout the month

#### Statewide

Game and Parks Fisheries Biologist Daryl Bauer writes: "July and August can be great times to take advantage of schooling activity by white bass and wipers on many Nebraska reservoirs. During these months, these open-water predators pursue the vast schools of open-water baitfish, especially gizzard shad, and when they push one of those baitfish schools to the surface, there is a feeding frenzy! That is most likely to happen early and late in the day, but sometimes that activity can last longer. Even if it does not, it offers at least a couple hours of fast action each day."

### Sesquicentennial Events

#### Throughout the month

#### Statewide

At the annual Fur Trade Days celebration in Chadron (July 6-9), you can take part in canoe racing, a parade, the Trader's Market, a film festival, softball tournament and more, along with a traditional rendezvous. Come to Seward for an annual Fourth of July celebration that has gained national attention and was named an official sesquicentennial event. For more information on these and other happenings, visit [ne150.org/calendar](http://ne150.org/calendar).



### Kites and Castles

#### July 29

Lake McConaughy State Recreation Area

Spend an afternoon on a white sandy beach sculpting a sand creation during this annual contest. While you're here, make a weekend of it and camp, boat or fish at Lake McConaughy or Lake Ogallala state recreation areas.



PHOTO BY JULE GEISER

### Monarch Monitoring Workshop

#### July 11

Nebraska Game and Parks northeast district office in Norfolk

Participants at this hands-on workshop will learn about monarch breeding populations by recording and reporting observations in a milkweed patch. Information collected will be used by wildlife and conservation experts.



PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER

# Wildlife Photography Through Pure Luck

## (and curious animals)

Story and photos by Chris Helzer

**M**ost wildlife photographers spend huge amounts of time and effort getting photos of animals. They scout locations, build blinds and then try not to think about needing a bathroom while they sit in those blinds for hours and hours, waiting for something to happen. Those people are crazy.

I am mostly a bug and wildflower photographer. Bugs and wildflowers

are everywhere, and I don't have to plan ahead to photograph them. When the light is good, I walk around with a camera and take pictures. It's a pretty good gig.

Despite being a bug and flower photographer, I do take wildlife photos now and then. Rather than rely on extensive planning and patience, though, I get wildlife photos primarily because I have a camera with me on

the rare occasions when an animal inexplicably decides to hold still long enough for me to photograph it. Sure, I don't get as many great wildlife photos as guys like Eric Fowler and Mike Forsberg, but I also spend a lot less time trying to figure out how to pee inside a tiny thatch-covered hut.

As inspiration to others who would like to take wildlife photos but don't want to dedicate their lives to doing so, I'm sharing some examples of how these shoots work in real life. I sincerely hope this will help many of you get great wildlife photos without really working at it.

### Prairie Dog

Before she headed off to start college, my daughter and I spent a couple great days up along the Niobrara River. One evening, we were meandering around The Nature Conservancy's Niobrara Valley Preserve and passed through a small prairie dog town. As we drove the pickup slowly into the town, we enjoyed watching the prairie dogs scurry back to their burrows, pause at the edge of the hole, and then dive to safety when we got too close. However, one particular dog didn't follow the pattern. As we drove closer, it just continued to stand and watch us, and we noticed it had two small pups feeding nearby. Eventually, I stopped the truck so Anna could get



A prairie dog contentedly chews on a leaf despite me crawling slowly toward it with a camera.

A northern bobwhite calls from a fence post at the edge of our family prairie while I photograph it through my truck window.



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**I sincerely hope these strategies will help many of you get great wildlife photos without really working at it.**

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This red-tailed hawk just stood and stared at me as I pulled up with an UTV, backed around to get a better angle, and eventually crawled out to the ground within 15 feet of it.

a good look at the prairie dog before it eventually decided to dive down its hole.

After a few minutes, it became clear that this was a great opportunity. We had accidentally stumbled upon a prairie dog that wasn't very bright. I rolled down the window of my truck and took a few photos. She didn't move. I slowly opened the door of my truck and lowered myself and my camera/tripod to the ground and peeked out from behind the door. She took a bite of a leaf. I slowly slid my tripod past the edge of the door and took a few photos from ground level. The prairie dog pups cavorted endearingly.

About 10 minutes later, following a series of slow and gradual movements by me, I found myself lying prone on the ground a mere 12 feet from the mother prairie dog, who was still feeding placidly while her kids ran around nearby. I took approximately six hundred thousand photos of her standing up, eating a leaf, standing up, looking around, and standing up, before I finally got bored and crept back to the truck so we could continue our trip.

## Red-tailed Hawk

Some friends and I were exploring a Sandhills ranch on a beautiful August day when we stopped our small caravan of off-road vehicles to check out a hawk standing in the middle of the prairie. After close observation of the bird through binoculars, the birders in the group declared it a juvenile ferruginous hawk. It later turned out it was a red-tailed hawk, but that's not actually important to the story. Once they had deciphered (incorrectly) the species of the bird, the birders drove on. As they passed near the hawk, it flew from the ground to a nearby post and then back to its original spot. My friend and I decided we'd drive our UTV a little closer to the hawk to see if there was a reason it was sitting where it was. We figured maybe it had caught something interesting to eat.

As we drove closer, I kept expecting the hawk to fly off to the same post it had when our companions had driven by. Instead, the hawk just peered at us with its bright yellow eyes without moving. Once we got within 25 feet



These pronghorn fawns were still wet from birth when I stumbled across them in the Sandhills. After a few quick photographs, I left them alone.

or so, it dawned on me that I should get my camera out of the bag and photograph the bird. I took a few photos, but the angle of light wasn't great, so I backed the UTV around in a half circle to get a better angle while the hawk continued to stare at us. Eventually, I opened the door, eased myself to the ground and took more photos of the bird from about 15 feet away before we decided to catch up with our friends. As we drove off into the hills, the hawk was still on the ground watching us go.

## Pronghorn Fawns

I was driving through the Niobrara Valley Preserve one afternoon, looking at the results of various grazing practices, when I spotted a pronghorn ahead of me, a little to the side of the trail road I was following. The

pronghorn stood with its head down, apparently feeding. I kept driving, wondering how long it would be until she finally noticed my approach. Eventually, she did raise her head, and upon seeing a truck within 100 yards of her, galloped up and over the hill. I looked over at the spot she'd left to see if I could tell what she'd been eating, and saw a slight movement. I got out of the truck to check it out.

When I got within a few yards, I finally realized the pronghorn hadn't been distracted by food but because she had been busily licking her newborn fawn. A few steps later, I saw a second fawn right behind the first. I never would have approached the pronghorn or her fawns if I'd known what was going on ahead of time. But since I'd already spooked their mom out of sight, I figured I might as well take a few quick photos, so I pulled my

camera out of the bag and did so. A couple seconds later, I retreated quickly to the truck and drove off so the mom could return to her kids. The fawns never moved the whole time.

## Northern Bobwhite

Our family owns a little land south of Aurora, including some prairie we manage for both profit and conservation. As I was driving a two-track path along the south edge of the property one day, I noticed a northern bobwhite on a fence post ahead of me. I stopped and rolled down the window to listen to it calling. After a minute or so, I decided to be on my way, and drove on toward the post where the bobwhite was sitting. I expected the bird to fly once I got closer, but it seemed intently focused on its song, despite my approach. Sensing an



This mule deer seemed more curious than frightened as I slowly moved toward it with my camera and photographed it.

opportunity, I opened my camera bag and grabbed my 300mm lens.

Shortly thereafter, I found myself parked right next to the quail, which was still performing its two-note call while I stuck my camera lens out the window wishing (not for the first time) that I owned a slightly longer lens. Since it was the first and only time I've photographed a quail, I took quite a few photos, trying to use different compositions, but I was pretty limited by the fact that I was stuck in a truck and the bird was standing on a post.

## Mule Deer

I got up early one morning in the Sandhills and climbed a steep dune to watch the sunrise. After a

big red sun lifted itself above the horizon, I wandered around a little, photographing yucca and other flowers in the early morning light. Just as I started heading back toward breakfast, I noticed a mule deer about 50 yards ahead of me. Since she was standing in beautiful light, I changed lenses on my camera in case she decided to stick around to be photographed.

I stood still for a few minutes to see what the deer was going to do. Eventually, she put her head down and started feeding, walking a few steps between bites. Every time she put her head down, I took a couple quiet steps of my own, gradually closing the gap between us to about 25 yards. The deer seemed perfectly content to keep eating, while monitoring my presence

with one eye. I started talking to my new acquaintance in a low voice and continued to approach at an angle, rather than directly at her. Within a few minutes, I was close enough to get some decent photos with my 300mm lens. I followed a parallel path to the deer for another 10 minutes or so, moving when she moved, and stopping to photograph her when she paused to look up at me. Eventually, when she meandered over the top of a small rise, I wished her a good morning and continued on my way toward sausage and pancakes.

## Grasshopper Sparrow

Several biologists and I were on a site visit in the Sandhills on a hot summer



With a grasshopper in its mouth, this grasshopper sparrow seemed to be waiting for me to go away so it could feed its young in a nearby nest. Once I realized what was happening, I moved on and left it alone.

day, and I was thirsty. I stopped my ATV and dug my water bottle out of my pack. As I was drinking, I saw a flash of movement and looked over to see a grasshopper sparrow on a leadplant stem, maybe 10 feet away. Just as I started pulling out my camera, my companions came roaring past me on their ATVs. Disappointed, I started putting my camera back in my bag, figuring I'd missed my chance at a nice bird photo. To my surprise, however, the sparrow stayed put, despite two ATVs passing right by.

As I focused my camera on the sparrow, I finally noticed the small grasshopper in its mouth. I guessed the bird was getting ready to feed hungry chicks nearby and figured that was why it didn't immediately fly away when

the ATVs drove past. I took a couple of quick photos and then drove my own ATV away, hoping fervently that none of us had driven over a nest. ■

**A note on ethics:** Despite my seemingly cavalier perspective on wildlife photography, I really do take great care not to unnecessarily harass wild animals. In most of the instances discussed here, I found myself close to an animal while I was simply driving along a road or trail. I didn't go out of my way to purposefully chase down animals that were minding their own business. I never would have approached the pronghorn or her fawns if I'd known what was going on ahead of time, and I stayed just long enough to get a couple photos

*before slipping quickly away without spooking them. While it's acceptable to take advantage of accidental encounters with wildlife, it's never ok to intentionally flush birds off their nest or nighttime roost, or to do anything else that might put an animal at risk or cause it unnecessary distress.*

Chris Helzer is the Director of Science for The Nature Conservancy in Nebraska. He has been a contributor to NEBRASKAland since 1994. Chris blogs at [prairieecologist.com](http://prairieecologist.com)



# A GATHERING OF CULTURES

A signature sesquicentennial event at Ash Hollow State Historical Park will bring together five distinct historic groups of the Ash Hollow area.

By Renae Blum

July 21-23 will be a special three days for the people of Lewellen near Ash Hollow State Historical Park. With the signature sesquicentennial event “Convergence on Sacred Ground,” they expect to welcome 15,000 to 20,000 people to the area for the celebration, recalling the scale of their landmark centennial celebration in 1967.

But the event will be special for other reasons as well. Convergence on Sacred Ground will celebrate and bring together five distinct historic groups of the Ash Hollow area: Native Americans, cowboys, fur traders, pioneers and homesteaders, and the United States military. The event’s title is in honor of the Native American people who once lived in Ash Hollow.

“Our event is an opportunity to make history by inviting the Native Americans back and honoring them

for what they contributed to the area,” said DeAnn Beard, one of the event’s organizers. “We wanted to provide an arena for them to come and tell their stories.”

Convergence on Sacred Ground will feature numerous educational and hands-on activities at five encampments representing each of the historic groups. At the pioneer encampment, visitors can milk a cow, gather eggs and churn butter; the fur trader encampment will feature trading, hide tanning and hawk and knife throwing; reenactors will portray daily life at the military encampment; and Sandhills ranchers will demonstrate cattle branding and herding, calf roping, blacksmithing and horse training at the cowboy encampment. At the Native American encampment, visitors can explore period-accurate tipis and see demonstrations of



PHOTO BY JUSTIN HAAG

**ABOVE:** Commemorating the Oregon Trail journey, the marker reads, “Oregon Trail, Marked by the State of Nebraska, 1912, Windlass Hill entrance to Ash Hollow.”

**RIGHT:** This traditional necklace was crafted by Drattling Leaf of Black Hawk, South Dakota, who will be displaying her work at Convergence on Sacred Ground alongside 10-20 other Lakota artists.



PHOTO BY TYLER WARREN AT THE NARRATIVE

Sweet spring water made Ash Hollow State Historical Park near Lewellen a major stopover on the Overland Trail and prompted prehistoric Indians to use it, too. Ruts etched by west-bound wagons are still visible on the bluffs. Today, the area’s beauty and sweeping vistas continue to make this area a popular destination for vacationers and travelers. The history, archaeology and paleontology of the area are interpreted at the visitor center, Ash Hollow Cave and exhibits and structures.





PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER

dancing, drumming, bead making, and moccasin making. Lakota Sioux elders will perform an oral history.

“People can go to the village and talk casually with them. It’s more informal and one-on-one,” Beard said.

In addition to the encampments, lectures and an interpretive center will provide a fuller story of Ash Hollow history. A separate display, The People’s Fair, will showcase exhibits created by families, organizations and businesses who have contributed to Lewellen and the Ash Hollow area in more recent times. Chuck-wagon meals, wagon trail rides and river rides will also be held each day at Ash Hollow State Historical Park, followed by live entertainment and other activities in Lewellen in the evenings.

A number of groups came together to make Convergence on Sacred Ground a reality, including the Friends of Ash Hollow, the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, the Nebraska State Historical Society, the Brulé Lakota and interested citizens. In recognition of the quality of the event, a governor-appointed commission has selected Convergence

**LEFT: Aerial of Oregon Trail wagon ruts and Highway 26 at Ash Hollow State Historical Park.**

**BELOW: This painting by Jean Jensen, “Evening in Ash Hollow - June 1847,” portrays various Ash Hollow historic groups. It will be on display.**



COURTESY OF JEAN JENSEN



PHOTO BY AARON NETT AT THE NARRATIVE

**LEFT: Both Paul Stover Soderman, left, and Phil Little Thunder will present at the event about a tragic massacre near Ash Hollow in 1855 that links their ancestors.**

**BELOW: Don and Lynne Benker of Skull Valley, Arizona, visit a replica sod house at Ash Hollow.**



PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER

on Sacred Ground as an official signature event celebrating Nebraska’s sesquicentennial.

“Our hope is that people leave Ash Hollow after this event understanding something about the Native Americans and the fur traders, cowboys, pioneers and military that they didn’t understand before,” Beard said. “And not just from reading it out of a book, but from having the opportunity to participate in what life was like for these groups.”

Activities will take place at Ash Hollow SHP on Friday, July 21, and Saturday, July 22, from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., and Sunday, July 23, from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m., followed by entertainment in Lewellen in the evenings. Ash Hollow State Historical Park is located on Highway 26, three miles south of Lewellen or 30 miles northwest of Ogallala in Garden County. More information is available at [ash-hollow150th.com](http://ash-hollow150th.com). ■

## A Once-in-a-Lifetime Opportunity



**While** cataloguing items in the basement of the Smithsonian Institution, Dr. James Hansen stumbled upon a series of objects that harken back to one of the Nebraska Territory’s darkest events: the Battle of Blue Water, also known as the Harney Massacre. On Sept. 3, 1855, General William S. Harney and his command of 600 men attacked and destroyed a Lakota village of about 250 people near Ash Hollow. Accounts estimate that 86 people were killed, including women and children; five were wounded, including Chief Little Thunder; and 70 taken captive.

Gouverneur Kemble Warren collected some of the slain Indians’ belongings and sent them to his daughter in upstate New York, who donated them to the Smithsonian. They have been in the museum’s basement ever since, viewed perhaps once or twice, but never on public display.

However, visitors to Convergence on Sacred Ground will have the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to view these items, which have been brought from the Smithsonian specifically to be exhibited at this event.

“And then they’ll go back to the Smithsonian and this may be the last time they’ll ever be viewed. So it’s a big deal,” said DeAnn Beard, who helped organize the event.

The Little Thunder family will be in attendance and will speak at the event, sharing the story of the Battle of Blue Water and their family’s history.

# Jewel on the Middle Loup

## Harold Andersen WMA

Story and photos by Eric Fowler

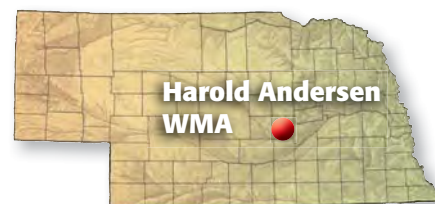
**Just down the Middle Loup River from the picturesque Danish community of Dannebrog lies a quiet wildlife area named for an Omaha native with Danish roots who, through his years as publisher of the Omaha World-Herald and as chairman of the Nebraska Game and Parks Foundation, had a lasting effect on Nebraska's outdoor resources: the late Harold Andersen.**

**Like a plume of smoke, a cloud rising above the Middle Loup River is kissed by the last rays of sunlight on a summer day at Harold Andersen Wildlife Management Area near Dannebrog.**



A bottomland pond created when the Middle Loup River changed its course is rimmed by vegetation, including golden glow, a moist-soil loving sunflower.

Covering 272 acres and more than a mile of riverfront, the area is a diverse mix of habitats. A tangle of willows and cottonwoods guard the riverbank. Below the high bank sits a bottomland forest of cottonwood, mulberry, hackberry and other trees, recently thinned of invasive cedars to improve habitat for turkeys, and a lowland meadow. The uplands above the river are a sandy, mixed loess prairie dotted with shrubs, guarded by a tree row on the west, and food plots on the northeast.



Harold Andersen WMA is located 2 miles north and 3 miles east of Dannebrog in Howard County. An access road crossing the area is open during the summer, and a service road provides easy foot access to the bottomland and river. The area, purchased in 1984 with Nebraska Habitat Stamp dollars, was named for the late Harold Andersen, long-time publisher of the Omaha World-Herald and Chairman of the Nebraska Game and Parks Foundation.



Shelf or bracket fungi, commonly known as artist's conk, grow from the underside of a fallen cottonwood in the bottomland forest.



The shallows of the Middle Loup shimmer under the rising sun. At bottom, an eastern kingbird takes watch from an American plum bush on the edge of the prairie.



There are catfish to be caught in the river. In the bottomlands, there are deer, ducks and turkeys to be hunted. In the uplands, hunters can find quail and pheasants. And anyone can find peace, quiet and beauty that Andersen would appreciate. ■

## Remembering Harold Andersen And His Love For the Outdoors

By Eric Fowler

**H**arold Andersen put his time, pen and voice behind many causes during and after his 23 years as publisher of the Omaha World-Herald. Nebraskans who appreciate the state's broad array of historical and natural resources should be thankful those resources were among "Andy's" passions and causes he supported.

Andersen was as honored for his work in his civic and philanthropic endeavors as he was for his work in the news industry. His philanthropic work included serving as the chairman of the Nebraska Game and Parks Foundation from its founding in 1983 until 2005, and as a member of the board until his death on December 15, 2015.

Under his leadership, the Foundation raised tens of millions of dollars to support many Nebraska Game and Parks Commission fisheries, wildlife, parks and education projects and programs, including:

- Purchase of land for and/or funded major construction projects at Rock Creek, Fort Atkinson and Ashfall state historical parks (SHP), and Platte River, Eugene T. Mahoney and Ponca state parks (SP).
- The donation of land for Arthur Bowring Ranch SHP and Keller Park State Recreation Area, and negotiating the lease for Smith Falls SP.
- Half-price youth lifetime hunting and fishing permits offered in drawings at special events.
- Fish and wildlife projects including funding an in-stream flow study on the Platte River, construction of goose pens for a reintroduction project, and wetland construction at Kiowa Wildlife Management Area (WMA).

At least some of Andersen's interest in Nebraska's outdoor resources was sparked by Gene Mahoney, for whom Mahoney SP was named. When Mahoney became director of the Commission in 1976, he convinced Andersen, a world traveler, to discover Nebraska's natural resources with him. Those trips led to a lasting friendship, opened Andersen's eyes to what Nebraska had to offer, and led to his first hunting trip, as well as many fishing and canoe trips with family, friends and business associates.

Andersen encouraged people to appreciate, protect and explore the outdoors through his own writing, through the outdoor writers he employed, and through the "Know Nebraska" tours the World-Herald and the Commission



COURTESY OF THE OMAHA WORLD-HERALD

sponsored. Through his connections, he brought others, and their donations, to the cause.

"He had a genuine interest and passion in our mission and what we were trying to accomplish: to get people outdoors in Nebraska, and educate young people, the next generation if you will, about opportunities in the outdoors. And he put his own time, effort, sweat and money into it," said Roger Kuhn, the Commission's assistant director in charge of program development, who worked with Andersen often during his tenure with the agency.

Andersen's efforts were significant enough that the visitor center at Fort Atkinson SHP, a WMA near Dannebrog and a cabin at Mahoney SP bear his name.

Jim Douglas, director of the Commission, said Andersen, through his work as a journalist and the Foundation, helped foster a greater appreciation of the state's historical sites, helped grow partnerships between the public and private sector that elevated conservation efforts, and "brought tremendous resources to bear in the development and maintenance of our premier park system as well as conservation of our treasured wildlife resources," Douglas said. "His legacy will be everlasting." ■

# Milkweeds for Monarchs

By Jenny Nguyen

Milkweed plants play a key role in our prairie ecosystem. They support the monarch butterfly and a wide range of other pollinator species including bees, moths, beetles and flies that feed on the pollen, nectar, leaves and stems of milkweeds. As a pollinator forages, it also facilitates the production of other plant seeds and fruits, which ultimately enhance an area's biodiversity.

Additionally, pollinators provide an important service to agriculture: Many of Nebraska's specialty crops such as sunflowers, tree fruits, melons, cucumbers, tomatoes, berries, pumpkins and eggplants require or benefit from pollinators. Pollinators also indirectly improve dairy products and meats as livestock can feed on the pollinated plants.

To imagine a world without pollinators is to imagine a world with fewer species and a lot less food. If

native pollinators and honey bees are allowed to decline too dramatically, producers could someday become pressed to pollinate crops by hand – a time consuming and more expensive way to go about business when beneficial insects could be doing the job much more efficiently. If pollinator populations collapse, ecosystems and economies will suffer.

The monarch butterfly is only one pollinator species, but its at-risk status indicates that not all is well in our environment. Because of reduced habitat, frequent mowing and pesticide and herbicide applications, monarchs and other pollinators are losing ground. For example, not only have habitat loss and additional stressors taken their toll on butterfly populations, monarch caterpillars also feed exclusively on the disappearing milkweed plant.

Therefore, the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission and other wildlife

agencies across the country have made pollinators, monarchs and milkweeds a priority.

"Recovery and conservation of the monarch and other pollinators will require a concerted effort by many partners over a wide geographic area," said Commission Director Jim Douglas. "The Commission is pleased to be a part of this noble endeavor to save an iconic species and hopes to enlist your help."

## Prairie Restoration

In 2016, the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission responded by launching a statewide conservation strategy for monarchs and at-risk pollinators. Planting milkweeds is the project's highest priority, and the Cowboy Recreation and Nature Trail, which stretches 321 miles across the northern part of the state, holds tremendous potential to increase

pollinator habitat and conserve biodiversity. The trail's right of way – areas beside the trail – includes 4,000 acres of public conservation lands suitable for native prairie restoration.

The goal is to plant 40,000 milkweed seedlings and restore nearly 1,000 acres of native prairie grassland along the Cowboy Trail and in at least 15 of Nebraska's state parks, according to Commission Wildlife Biologist Melissa Panella. The Nebraska Environmental Trust and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation are funding these restoration efforts. The project is expected to carry through to 2018.

"More than two dozen organizations have made commitments to pollinator conservation in the state," said Panella. Northern Prairies Land Trust, Prairie Plains Resource Institute, and the Commission have plans to restore and enhance monarch habitat in eastern Nebraska. The Nebraska Wildlife Federation and the Commission are partnering to lead workshops and conduct milkweed surveys.

In addition to planting milkweeds, current haying, mowing, prescribed burning and spraying practices have also been adjusted to encourage the comeback of native forbs and nectar plants. Grant funding will also allow for invasive tree-clearing projects – mostly eastern red-cedar – along the trail and in state parks. New acres of pollinator habitat are also being established in state parks.

In 2016, 15,000 milkweed seedlings were planted on the Cowboy Trail near Bassett and Neligh, 350 at Dead Timber State Recreation Area near Scribner and over 400 at Willow Creek SRA near Pierce.

By the end of 2017, native seed mixtures will have been planted on 77 acres of state park lands and 60 acres on the Cowboy Trail. In addition to the 10,000 milkweeds planted on the Cowboy Trail this spring, a team of seven AmeriCorps NCCC (National Civilian Community Corps) volunteers will plant 5,000 more milkweeds this fall on trail sections in Neligh, Oakdale and Long Pine, as well as at Niobrara and Ponca state parks.

In 2018, the Commission plans to seed 95 more acres on state park and recreation areas plus 60 acres on the Cowboy Trail.



Fourth- through sixth-grade students from O'Neill Elementary School plant milkweed seedlings on the Cowboy Trail right of way in O'Neill.

## Partnerships and Education

Since the project's launch, local agencies such as the Nebraska Department of Roads have jumped in to help. NDOR has committed 100 person hours per year for three years toward native prairie restoration along rights of way for state highways 275 and 20, which run adjacent to the Cowboy Trail.

In 2016, the AmeriCorps from Vinton, Iowa, stayed two weeks to assist Commission staff with milkweed planting. They will return this year to donate their services from Sept. 13 to Nov. 2.

Local support is paramount to creating long-term conservation awareness of the plight of monarch butterflies and other pollinators. Public education workshops through the Monarchs on a Mission program and citizen scientists are designed to inform teachers, students, families and landowners on the importance of pollinators and how they can help monarchs in their own communities. Previous milkweed planting efforts on the Cowboy Trail included the assistance of students from O'Neill Elementary School, Elkhorn Valley Schools in Tilden, Pierce High School and Battle Creek High School.

## How You Can Help

To reverse the dramatic decline of monarchs, current models call for the planting of more than 1 billion milkweed stems and restoring or enhancing 7 million acres of land

with diverse pollinator-friendly plants across the Midwest from Pennsylvania to Nebraska. This translates to approximately 125 million new stems in Nebraska.

Citizens in towns and villages along the Cowboy Trail right of way are invited to assist the Commission with the planting of 10,000 milkweed seedlings this September and October; milkweeds will be donated by the Monarch Watch program at the University of Kansas. Park staff from Willow Creek State Recreation Area, the Bassett Service Center, and an AmeriCorps team will be leading the effort. For dates and locations, visit [OutdoorNebraska.org/volunteerschedule](http://OutdoorNebraska.org/volunteerschedule).

If you are unable to volunteer, you can still help monarchs at home.

"Milkweeds are a vital component of healthy, native grasslands, and they can be a suitable choice for growth in yards, gardens, rights of way, and land that has been marginal for crop production," said Panella.

To keep track of the efforts in Nebraska, the Commission has created the Milkweed Tracker at [OutdoorNebraska.org/milkweedtracker](http://OutdoorNebraska.org/milkweedtracker) for landowners, students, and conservationists to register their milkweed planting efforts. If you are managing a site for pollinators, have recently restored a grassland, or added milkweeds to your garden, register that information so your milkweeds can be counted in the statewide restoration effort.

For upcoming monarch-related workshops, visit the Nebraska Project WILD Facebook events page. ■



Milkweeds for Monarchs pollinator habitat project sign on the Cowboy Trail near Neligh.

# Please, No Bobbers

## Introducing Adults to Fishing

Story and photos by Jeff Kurrus

Brad Feeken  
admires a nice  
largemouth bass he  
caught on a Cass  
County farm pond.

“How about the spinnerbait?” Brad Feeken of Gretna asked as we fished from a john boat on a small pond in Cass County. “Buzzbait,” I responded. “Buzzbait?” “That’s the name of that lure,” I said. “A spinnerbait is a little bit different.” These are the types of conversations that I have with my newest fishing partner, 41-year-old Brad Feeken, during our times on the water during the spring and summer – times that he would have never imagined having even a few years ago.

### Sit Still? No Way

While growing up in Hastings, fishing was the last thing on Feeken’s mind. “I hated the waiting,” he told me on one of our first trips together. “Dad would hand me a pole with a bobber and I’d cast out.” Then it became agony to a kid unwilling, or unable, to stay still waiting for that bobber to disappear.

So when I explained to him that largemouth bass fishing was very little, if any, sitting and waiting, he dipped his toes back in the water. And on our first trip together, as bass after



Buzzbaits (top) are traditionally fished on top and their blade makes a lot of commotion, while spinnerbaits (bottom) are usually fished beneath the surface.

bass attacked our topwater offerings, he tilted his head toward the heavens above: “Dad! Why did you make me fish with a bobber?!” He laughed, then made another of what turned out to be hundreds of casts that day.

These casts are perfect for his

mentality, as well as that of many other adults looking for a weekend passion, for two reasons. One, he can’t sit still. Anyone who spends more than a few minutes around him knows he is in constant motion. Two, he’s a perfectionist.

**Feeken tilted his head toward the heavens above. “Dad! Why did you make me fish with a bobber?!” he laughed.**



The excitement of fighting a fish, including a largemouth bass, never gets old, whether you've fished for 50 years or it's your first time on the water.



A crankbait's shape, including its lip, enables it to dive and stay beneath the water when reeled.



Topwater, weedless frog imitations allow an angler to fish these in heavy structure with little worry of becoming entangled.

So when I told him that, quite often, the difference between catching and not catching a fish, especially on farm ponds, is making a cast two inches from a stump versus two feet, he was intrigued. Even a fishless cast can provide satisfaction to an angler who is striving to throw a lure exactly where they want.

## By Himself

Anyone that has ever introduced another person to hunting or fishing understands that there is a very important day that eventually happens to the new outdoor enthusiast – the day they call you from the field.

A person is fully vested when they begin to hunt and fish by themselves. I saw it when I started fishing with long-time *NEBRASKAland* contributor Matthew Marx, who began fishing in earnest in 2002 shortly after we first met. Since then he has made

trips across the country in pursuit of largemouth bass, northern pike, muskies and a number of other fish.

But it didn't end with fishing. Marx is there on every opening day dove hunt now, is a crack rifle shot when he's in the stand on the opening day of rifle season and loves stalking turkeys with his bow – all of which started from an afternoon water cooler conversation we had years ago about the outdoors when we were teaching colleagues.

Now Feeken is right at the precipice himself. When I recently told him that my favorite place to largemouth bass and northern pike fish is a mere six-and-a-half hours away and that we need to carve out a couple of very long summer days to drive, fish, and drive home again, he had one suggestion: "We need at least one more day."

My phone will be ringing very soon. ■



## Teaching an Adult

In many ways, teaching an adult is the same as teaching a child a new outdoor pursuit, except for one important difference – adults learn faster. While a child's mind is a sponge ready to soak up any information you can pass on to them, they are constantly battling against their own attention span. However, an adult has the ability to pick up the technical aspects more quickly. Plus, adults are generally more coordinated than kids, so teaching a 40-year-old the nuances of a baitcasting reel, for example, will often go smoother than teaching an eight-year-old.

Use the tactics that you're explaining to the new angler as well. Nothing helps more to introduce another strategy than to be able to show them fish being caught a different way than they already know.

Lastly, be confident enough to say "I don't know" when you're unsure why fish are, or are not, active on a given fishing day. This will further explain to your new fishing partner that their new passion is a constant learning process, and that even though they are new, you will both be learning together.

## Being Taught

Switching from hook-and-bobber fishing to a long list of terminology and techniques including crankbaits, slow-rolling, spinnerbaits, bottom-bouncing, fan-casting and more can be daunting and very uncomfortable. Give yourself time. The more you slowly start to learn from your partner, and then read and see on your own, the more the puzzle pieces start to fit together.

Personally, fly fishing with wet flies seemed an impossible task until I did it for the first time at Two Rivers State Recreation Area's trout lake last year. Once I learned to watch my line and use the same stop-and-go line stripping techniques I use when I'm using baitcasting gear for largemouth bass, I had enough success to stay interested.

Next came a gradual gaining of knowledge, including definitions of tippets, roll-casting and tapered line. In many respects, the same types of tips I'm giving Feeken regarding bass fishing are being given to me by other anglers regarding fly fishing.

Now, under two years later, I'm planning a late-summer trout fishing expedition to Nebraska's Pine Ridge and the Black Hills of South Dakota confident I'll catch fish.

# Bee Flies

*These little insects live double lives as pollinators and parasites.*

By Chris Helzer

Insects live surprisingly fascinating lives, and bee flies are no exception. Sure, they're flies that look and act much like bees, but that's just a tiny bit of their story. These long-nosed little insects live double lives as both pollinators and parasites.

As pollinators, adult bee flies carry pollen from flower to flower on their fuzzy bodies. They are attracted to those flowers by the promise of sweet nectar, which they acquire through their lengthy proboscis. When flowers provide a platform to perch and feed from, bee flies will happily sit and eat, but their extraordinary ability to hover and feed simultaneously gives them access to even more opportunities. Much like hummingbirds and sphinx moths, bee flies can zip up to a flower, hang in the air before it, and extract its sugary reward. Scientific literature says bee flies also eat pollen, but it's unclear how they would get those sticky pollen grains through their long skinny mouth

tube and into their body, and I've not yet found anyone who can explain it.

It's not shocking to learn that bee flies are pollinators – they look the part, after all. What you might not guess from looking at them is that, as larvae, they are voracious parasites. There are many kinds of bee flies, and each has its own preferred target. Antlions, tiger beetles, moths, grasshoppers and bees are all subjected to parasitism by bee flies. Some bee flies hover above and flick their eggs into the burrows of ground-nesting bees, where the bee fly larvae latch onto and suck dry the bee larvae.

The species of bee fly shown here is *Systoechus vulgaris*, which is parasitic on grasshoppers. Female grasshoppers use their ovipositors (appendages on the rear end of their body) to dig tunnels into the ground where they insert their eggs. Bee flies can sometimes be seen hovering noisily above areas where this egg-laying is taking place, chasing each other around

and periodically dropping down to lay their own eggs near the nest tunnels of grasshoppers. When the bee fly larvae hatch out, they immediately burrow into the tunnels where they find and feed on the egg pods of the grasshoppers. Because of this behavior, bee flies have been credited with helping to control the size of grasshopper populations.

As you're wandering the state this summer, keep an eye out for bee flies. You'll have to look closely; they're only about one-third of an inch long and look a lot like bees, but with a narwhal-like protrusion out the front. Your best chance of seeing them will be while they're hovering near or landing on flowers as adults. When you do find them, though, remember you're only seeing half of their identity. As adults, they look like sweet, fuzzy, slightly peculiar-looking bees, but in their younger days, they sucked the life out of the helpless children of other insects. ■



PHOTO BY CHRIS HELZER

# junior journal

interesting notes for readers of all ages

by Lindsay Rogers and Donna Schimonitz

## Total Solar Eclipse: August 21, 2017

By Kevin M. Lee, National Science Foundation, Division of Undergraduate Education

Imagine that you are out walking after lunch on a hot summer day. Although there are no clouds in the sky, you notice that it isn't that bright outside. About 20 minutes later you notice that the sky is even darker. But it is the middle of the day! The sun has been covered up!

The event described above is called a solar eclipse. Many Nebraskans will experience a total solar eclipse at about noon on Aug. 21, 2017.

Eclipses occur due to the positions of the sun, Earth and the moon and the shadows that Earth and the moon cause. All three objects must line up for an eclipse to occur. For a solar eclipse, the moon is in between the sun and Earth so that the sun is blocked for some observers on Earth. Even though the sun is much larger than the moon, the sun is also much farther away. So, the two appear to be about the same size in the sky.

On Aug. 21, 2017, as Earth

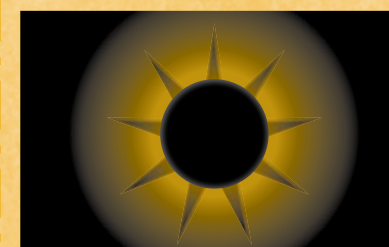
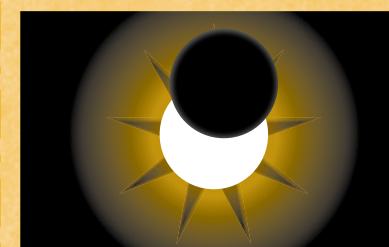
rotates, the shadow of the moon will travel across the surface of Earth. In the United States, it will start in Oregon and move eastward until it reaches South Carolina about four hours later. In Nebraska, the entire eclipse will last about 2½ hours, but the total covering of the sun (known as totality) will only last about 2½ minutes near the middle of the eclipse. Totality will be seen from about half of Nebraska. Locations further north and south will only see a partial solar eclipse, meaning that the moon will cover up part of the sun, but not all of it. Everyone in the continental United States will at least see a partial eclipse.

*Looking directly at the sun is always dangerous for your eyes – so don't ever do it!* You can use special eclipse glasses to view the eclipse or project the eclipse image onto a screen. You should also plan for viewing the eclipse on the Internet in case of cloudy weather locally.

So why are total solar eclipses of great interest to astronomers? Typically the sun is too bright to observe its faint outer region (the corona of the sun). But during a total solar eclipse, the moon blocks out light from the sun's bright surface and astronomers can learn about the sun's faint corona. ☀

### Looking Up!

Identify each of the following pictures as a full eclipse, partial eclipse or the sun's corona.



Answers, top to bottom:  
corona, partial eclipse, total eclipse.

### NATURE CALENDAR

- Mink kits traveling with mother along stream banks: *June- August*
- Dragonflies lay eggs on ponds and wetlands: *Late July through August*
- Look for snakes basking in the warm sun early in the morning: *All summer*
- Prairie wildflowers begin to bloom: *Mid-June through September*



American mink with kit photo by Getty Images

## Favorite Lure Memories

*Time will tell if your favorite lure remains your favorite.*

By Jeff Kurrus

In the June edition of *NEBRASKAland Magazine*, writer Jacob Jadowski told about his favorite fishing lure – the 1.5 Strike King KVD Square Bill Crankbait – and requested readers to send in their favorites.

During the last month, I had a chance to look at these responses from a number of people that I have shared time on the water with, and a few that I haven't. What became evident very quickly was how answers to questions like these change through the years, depending on who you're fishing with and what you're fishing for.

Personally, when I was still in elementary school my dad nicknamed me "Worm Man" for my affinity to fish a plastic worm, and when I asked this same question to my lifelong friend and fishing partner Rob Gaia, he accompanied his answer with our long-standing banter: "Crawdad-colored plastic worm," he wrote, "because I'm better than you at worm fishing!" A sentiment he hasn't forgotten since our youth.

However, as I continued to grow as an angler in my early teens, I began to fish more crankbaits, mainly crawfish and frog-colored imitations, just like one of my fishing partners at the time, Mike Hammett, and for the same reasons. "My favorite lure is still a Bandit crankbait that's chartreuse with a black back," he said. "It covers water fast when I'm largemouth bass fishing and I like to bump it off cover."

I continued to fish crankbaits, spinnerbaits and worms well into my 20s until I found myself fishing with Paul Turner, a Georgia native stationed with the Air Force in Bellevue. He introduced me to a weedless scum frog, which I can still remember drawing a strike from a fish in a gigantic culvert in eastern Nebraska's Beaver Lake.

And while that particular brand of scum frog was short lived, I spent the next 10 years primarily fishing another version that has been well chronicled

in these pages, which I still continue to fish today.

I also fish buzzbaits, like Monte and Scott Mares from Seward, and can recount a number of days when that was the lure to catch fish with, and am taken down a different path of memories after asking Nebraska native Ryan Sparks about his favorite lure: the lipless crankbait. "My favorite is a Strike King red eye shad in a natural color like shad, white or silver."

And this is what I like most about this question – it's so particular to a time in your life. There will, of course, be lures that stand the test of time, but there is also a nostalgia to fishing that reemerges every time an angler opens their tackle box and sees a lure from the past – the zara spook that a pike hit so angrily at the Valentine National Wildlife Refuge's Clear Lake that it scared me; the dark green crankbait that nearly turned white in one day from all the big bass hitting it on a private lake in Omaha; or even the black woolly bugger used while

fly fishing for smallmouth bass that changed my entire approach to catching these bronze fighters.

Right now, above any other lure, I'd fish with a 3/8-ounce tandem-bladed black spinnerbait. It's caught trophy largemouth and smallmouth bass, northern pike and walleye.

What I'm most interested in, however, is if this lure will still be my favorite five years from now. I'm also interested to see if Jadowski's will still be the square bill crankbait. If it is, I can't wait to hear the reasons why. But if it's not, I'm even more excited about what lure replaced it. ■



Currently, my favorite fishing lure is a tandem-bladed black spinnerbait, which I use primarily to catch largemouth bass.

PHOTOS BY JEFF KURRUS

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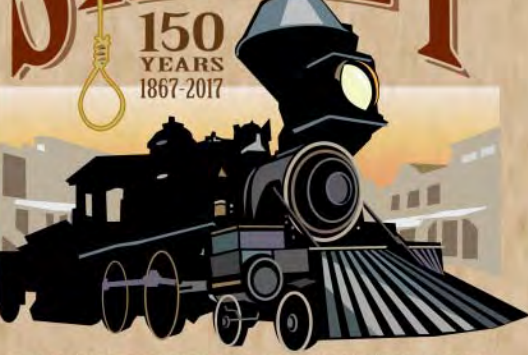
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# Small Grains, Big Results

*Wheat may not be padding farmers' wallets these days, but it remains a major asset for making our state rich with pheasants.*

By Justin Haag

When pursuing ring-necked pheasants and other upland game birds, hunters often find success by keying on what farmers have been growing in their fields. As no coincidence, many of the best locations

will be humming with combine harvesters this month.

John Laux, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission upland habitat and access program manager, said pheasants and other upland game birds thrive in areas of the state with

abundant small grains, namely wheat and milo.

"The presence of winter wheat on the landscape is a huge driver of pheasant abundance in Nebraska, there's no doubt," Laux said. "If you lay out a map showing acres planted to wheat, it pretty much mirrors the areas with our highest pheasant densities."

Research conducted by the Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln reinforces this observation. Researchers found that areas of the state with abundant small grains and fewer trees tend to support higher pheasant densities. In Nebraska, most of those small grain acres are in wheat.

Laux said wheat can provide suitable cover for pheasants throughout the year but its value during the nesting season is what really sets it apart.

"Unlike corn and soybeans, winter wheat is well-established by late April or early May and remains undisturbed throughout much of the nesting season. If the wheat crop is far enough along during nest initiation to provide overhead concealment from predators, they will nest it," he said.

Winter wheat is not a preferred nesting cover compared to undisturbed grasslands such as those enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program. However, recent research has suggested that wheat complements these other forms of nesting cover and creates more usable space which, in turn, improves overall productivity. UNL researchers found a lower risk of nest predation in CRP fields with a greater proportion of wheat in the surrounding landscape.

"Wheat increases the amount of area that predators have to search to find a nest," Laux said. "The more disked or fallow fields you have surrounding CRP fields, the higher the likelihood that predators will just key in on the CRP."

Wheat harvest begins around the Fourth of July in the southwestern part



A juvenile rooster ring-necked pheasant (*Phasianus colchicus*) forages near a wheat field in Sioux County.

of the state and ends in the northwest as July turns to August. The peak pheasant hatch in Nebraska occurs during the first week of June and the chicks usually become mobile well before the combines start running. That being said, many unsuccessful pheasant hens will attempt to re-nest later in the summer. For this reason, pheasant production and brood survival often improves with a delayed wheat harvest, because of rain for instance. Too much precipitation can also be detrimental to pheasant reproduction, however.

Whether or not pheasants use a wheat field after harvest depends a lot on the farmer, and most modern agriculture practices have not helped the birds.

"Historically, once wheat was harvested, farmers would allow annual weeds to grow among the stubble during late summer," Laux said. "Back then we didn't have modern day herbicides and this weedy growth provided excellent cover and attracted nutrient-rich insects for growing pheasant chicks. Pheasants continued to use this cover throughout the fall and winter months and it provided some amazing hunting opportunities. With advances in weed control, wheat stubble has lost much of its value to pheasants, especially as brood cover."

Laux said the harvesting technique can also influence the amount of use by pheasants. It can also result in financial benefits for producers, as erosion is minimal and less moisture is lost to

arid winds and the scorching sun.

"More and more producers are converting stripper heads because they leave taller residue in their fields which results in more moisture savings. Tall stubble is also better for pheasants so it's a win-win," he said.

Small grains have been a key component to the Commission's Berggren Plan, the dynamic initiative adopted in 2016 to improve the state's pheasant hunting. Through the Open Fields and Waters Program, the Commission offers annual per acre payments to farmers who provide public hunting access. Increasing hunting access on tall wheat and milo fields is a priority across much of western Nebraska. Last year alone, there were 15,000-20,000 acres of tall stubble available for public hunting access.

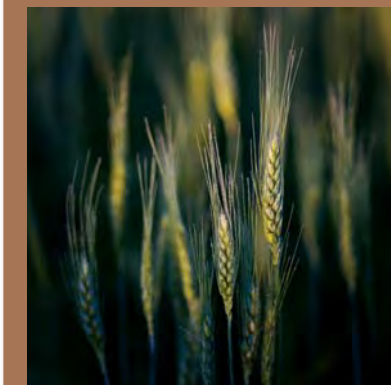
The bad news is that Nebraska's wheat acreage has been declining. The USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service is reporting a 10 percent decrease of acreage planted to winter wheat this year compared to last, a statistic that follows a long-term trend. In Nebraska, producers planted 1.11 million acres of wheat for this coming harvest, compared to more than 2 million a decade ago and more than 3 million in the early 1980s. The all-time record, since the statistics service began keeping track, was 5.018 million acres in 1949. This long-term decline can be attributed to many different factors but ultimately wheat acres have

## Tall Stubble Programs

The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission and its partner organizations have financial incentives for landowners to leave stubble for wheat and milo 14 inches or taller.

For more information, visit [OutdoorNebraska.org](http://OutdoorNebraska.org) or contact one of these representatives:

- Alliance: Matt Steffl, 308-763-2940
- Alma: Logan Shoup, 308-920-0336
- Chadron: Shelley Steffl, 308-432-6183
- North Platte: Adam Kester, 308-535-8025
- Kearney: Justin Haahr, 308-865-5308



been replaced by other crops, including corn and soybeans, which are much less beneficial to pheasants.

The benefits to upland game birds usually are not enough to convince farmers to incorporate wheat into their cropping rotations. The Commission and its habitat partners may offer some incentives for small grains, but they will likely never be enough to be a major influence in the farm markets. If Nebraska's quality of pheasant hunting ever returns to the glory days of the 1950s and '60s, though, one can bet the presence of small grains will have something to do with it. ■



Dan Lucht of Chadron shows off his limit of pheasants harvested during a walk through an Open Fields and Waters property north of Alliance.

► This is a photo of me with a northern pike I caught in February 1967 at Rock Creek Lake State Recreation Area. I was fishing with Floyd Nicholson for trout at the time when a northern took the bait. A long battle ensued, and when the victory was won, I was eligible for Master Fisherman honors with this 14-pound, one-half-ounce, 37-inch-long northern. It was caught on an eight-pound line. At that time, I lived and taught school in Imperial.

— Dwight Hatch, Ogallala



◄ Attached are three photos taken during what had become an annual trip to a ranch north of Johnstown to get our Christmas trees. The trip started during my last year as a science teacher at Ainsworth High School. We went to a ranch on Plum Creek where two of my students had lived and were allowed to get a couple pine trees. We moved to Grand Island in 1962 and in 1963 decided to make a daylong trip to the Plum Creek ranch the Friday after Thanksgiving.

On our last trip in 1965, my wife, Ann, fixed lunch, a thermos of milk and coffee, and water jugs, and we drove north to Plum Creek. After talking to the rancher, we went Christmas tree hunting and found our trees on the ridge above the creek. After cutting our trees, we did some exploring and found several fossils. This started a fossil hunt which resulted in our collecting eight or 10. On our way home via some back roads, we got an up-close view of a private small herd of bison.

The tree picture included Sue, Jean, Mariann, Ann and Judi. Another shows mom and the girls looking. The third photo shows Mariann and Sue with a couple of the fossils collected. This trip was one of many around Nebraska while we lived there.

— Al Pogge, Quincy, Illinois

Send contributions to: Portraits from the Past, NEBRASKAland Magazine, P.O. Box 30370, Lincoln, NE 68503-0370. Or e-mail to Tim.Reigert@Nebraska.gov. Photos should show people enjoying Nebraska outdoor activities, such as camping, boating, hunting or fishing, and must have been taken before 1980. We will give priority to unusual photos or activities. When possible, please include a story about the photograph and identify the people, places and approximate date it was taken. Text may be edited and photos adjusted for reproduction. All photos will be returned.

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# Baked Fish Casserole

*A down-home, meat-and-potatoes kind of meal.*

By Julie Geiser

Baked fish casserole is a concoction my husband, Tom, thought up several years ago. It is a favorite at the Geiser table and a hit with guests, too. This is a meat-and-potatoes, stick-to-your-ribs dish that is great any time of year and, despite its name, is delicious.

Any type of game fish can be used in this recipe, but we usually use panfish such as bluegill or crappie, as the fillets are a good size for casseroles. Game fish with larger fillets also can be used, but we cut the fillets in half, making them single-serving size. Everything in this casserole is precooked, then baked until warm and bubbly. While Tom's baked fish casserole does take a little more prep time than some other fish dishes, it is worth the extra effort.

**Servings: 4 to 6**

**Prep Time: 45 minutes**

**Bake time: 20 minutes**

**Ingredients:**

- 6 to 8 pan-sized fish fillets
- 4 medium potatoes (can be peeled or not)
- 8 slices bacon, cooked and crumbled
- 1 9-ounce package of Béarnaise sauce mix
- Finely crumbled saltine crackers
- 2 eggs
- ½ cup of milk
- ½ cup of roux (recipe below)
- ¼ cup of butter
- ¼ cup of chopped onion
- ½ cup of all-purpose flour
- Milk
- 3½-inch thick slices of Velveeta cheese
- Steak seasoning to taste
- Chives for garnish, optional

1. Wash and slice the potatoes into ½-inch slices and boil in water until you can easily pierce them with a knife. While the potatoes are boiling, fry the bacon in a skillet until crisp. When cool, crumble bacon into a bowl and set aside. When the potatoes are



cooked, drain the water and place them in a greased 9-by-9 baking dish so they cover the bottom of the dish.

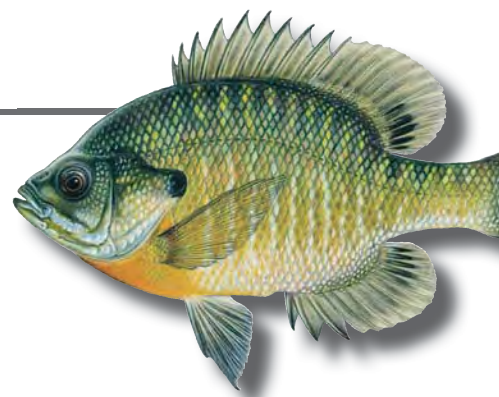
2. Start the roux by melting the butter in a skillet. Add the onion and slightly brown before adding about ½-cup of all-purpose flour to the butter and onion. Stir the roux mix and add milk until it is a gravy-like consistency. Add the Velveeta slices and melt, stirring constantly. Add more milk as needed. Add a few dashes of your favorite steak seasoning to the roux mix. Pour the roux over the potatoes and sprinkle with half of the crumbled bacon.

3. Beat the eggs and mix with ½-cup of milk. Finely crush one packet of saltine crackers in a gallon-size zip-close bag. Rinse fish fillets off, pat them dry and place in the egg and milk wash, and then dip into the saltines and fry in the reserved bacon grease over medium

heat. Brown the fillets on both sides and place over the potatoes, covering them.

4. Prepare the Béarnaise sauce mix as directed on the package or make your own homemade version and pour over the fish. Sprinkle the remaining crumbled bacon over the fish. Bake in a 350 degree oven, uncovered, for 20 minutes or until you see the sauces start to bubble. Top with cut chives if desired and serve. ■

*Julie Geiser is our magazine writer/photographer stationed in North Platte. Her other duties include outdoor education, youth mentoring and the Becoming an Outdoors-Woman program.*



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## The Big Show

Throughout Nebraska people will be celebrating the Fourth of July with barbecues, family, friends and fireworks. Front yards in many neighborhoods will be full of people in lawn chairs waiting for darkness to take over the sky so the show of lights can begin.

While some communities have large displays put on for the entire town or city, there are always those few that go overboard for fireworks; like kids in a candy shop with no spending limit, these people fill the night sky with beauty. Everyone knows that one person who puts on a huge display every year.

Last year, with my husband and camera in tow, we headed to the small town of Stapleton where D.L. Bay goes overboard for the holiday simply for the love of shooting things off. The whole town shows up, setting up lawn chairs and lining the streets with cars, and they wait. Next to a Quonset, music from the 1980s signals to bystanders that the show is about to begin. As explosions, beautiful colors and bursts of sparkles gleam in the sky, the crowd claps and screams their approval of the big show. Wherever you may be when the fireworks fill the night sky, or who is lighting them, may you feel the same sense of pride and awe as the residents gathered around that Quonset in Stapleton.

Julie Geiser  
May 31, 2017



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