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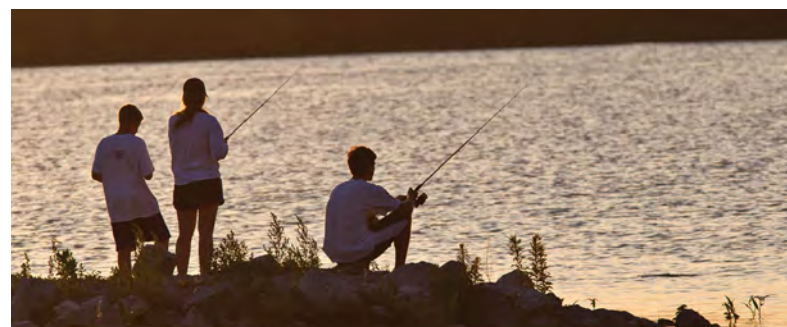


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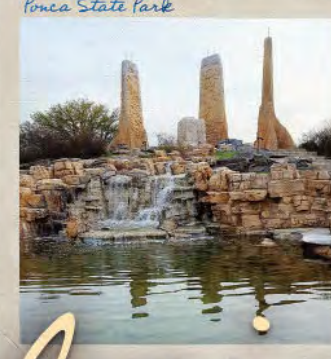
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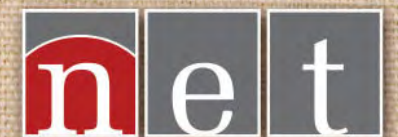


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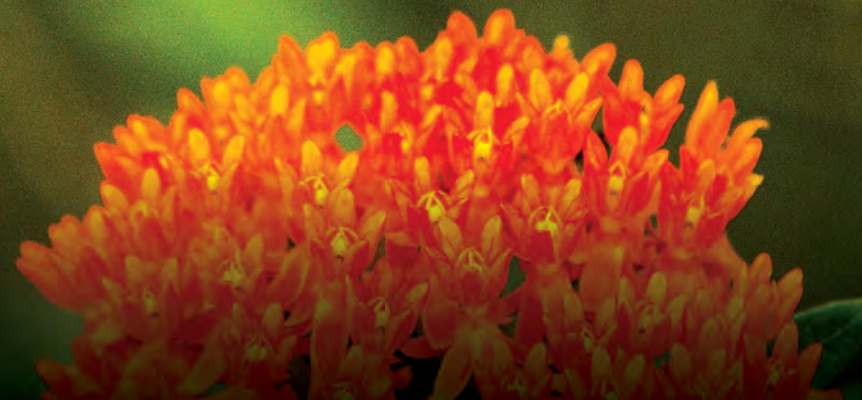
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Look for the Peregrine Falcon image on your Nebraska tax return.



Nebraskaland Volume 98 • No. 2
March 2020

Cover: Sandhill cranes leave their roost on the Platte River in Hall County shortly after sunrise.
Photo by Eric Fowler.



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PHOTO BY JUSTIN HAAG

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Table with 3 columns: Date, City, Chapter. Rows include: 3/6/2020 Eustis Wachtel Fur Immer QF, 3/7/2020 Alliance Heritage PF, 3/7/2020 Aurora Lincoln Creek PF, 3/7/2020 Ord Loup River PF, 3/7/2020 Wisner Lower Elkhorn Valley PF, 3/12/2020 Elkhorn Douglas County West PF, 3/14/2020 Ponca Dixon County PF, 3/14/2020 Fremont Dodge County PF, 3/14/2020 Gering Oregon Trail PF, 3/19/2020 Norfolk Elkhorn Valley PF, 3/20/2020 Wayne Logan Creek PF, 3/21/2020 Kimball Mile High PF.

Table with 3 columns: Date, City, Chapter. Rows include: 3/21/2020 Blair Washington County PF, 3/27/2020 Johnson Nemaha Valley PF, 3/28/2020 South Bend Cass County PF, 3/28/2020 Neligh Golden Prairie PF, 3/28/2020 Gordon Niobrara Sportsman PF, 3/28/2020 Cambridge Republican Valley PF, 3/28/2020 Loup City Sherman County PF, 4/4/2020 Stockville Medicine Creek PF, 4/11/2020 Oshkosh Antelope Valley PF, 4/17/2020 Ashland Lower Platte PF, 4/25/2020 Syracuse Otoe County PF.



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Chris Bergstrom, Omaha
Milky Way near Lake Waconda

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upcoming issue.

Kacie Clark, Banner County
Bighorn Sheep near McGrew



Mike Benkis, Omaha
Sandhill Crane





Lynette Hahne, Lincoln
Fox and Fox Squirrel



Evan Hindman, Cedar Rapids, IA
Windmill South of Valentine



Sena Williams, Omaha
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*Please include your postal address
and telephone number. Letters may be
condensed and edited. Photographs are
also welcome.*

LIFE'S CIRCLE

A deer skull stands out in a landscape emerging from winter at Bordeaux Creek Wildlife Management Area.

PHOTO BY JUSTIN HAAG



PHOTO BY JUSTIN HAAG

THREATENED AND ENDANGERED: THE MCCOWN'S LONGSPUR

By Melissa J. Panella

The McCown's longspur (*Rhynchophanes mccownii*) is one of a few bird species endemic to the Great Plains, which means that it is native and restricted to only a certain area. In many cases, endemic species are especially vulnerable because of their limited distribution and specialized habitats. Endemics are typically unable to find new locations with conditions suitable for their survival when the current territories they depend upon become degraded or converted to other uses.

McCown's longspurs are grassland birds. They thrive when there is open country rich with food resources, such as the shortgrass prairie of western Nebraska. Longspurs stay relatively close to the earth to forage for seed and insects on bare or sparsely vegetated ground. The males are master aerial acrobatic performers, displaying on the rolling hilltops of the plains in anticipation that their song and dance will attract the attention of an onlooking interested female mate. Their nesting also takes place on the ground, with their nests often positioned atop hills and buttes.

Long-term monitoring efforts have shown a substantial decrease in the number of McCown's longspurs across their range. In Nebraska, it has become increasingly harder to detect their nests. In 2018, staff of the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission proposed the McCown's longspur for

listing as threatened in Nebraska because of the substantial downward trend documented for the species.

Nebraska Game and Parks Commission is now prioritizing conservation of the longspur among the agency's many wildlife responsibilities. The addition of the McCown's longspur to the state of Nebraska list of threatened species will help bring recognition and possible funding sources to conserve this sparrow-like bird into the future. If more nesting locations can be detected, the Commission will work with willing property owners to help ensure that the eggs will hatch nestlings that have a fighting chance to survive. In fact, the McCown's longspur is a species that prefers well-grazed rangelands, so conservation of this species can go hand-in-hand with strategic cattle grazing.

One of the most important objectives of the Nebraska Natural Legacy Project is to recover endangered and threatened species. State wildlife grants and Nebraska Environmental Trust funds have been critical to supporting the work that will improve and maintain shortgrass prairie habitat in the Great Plains.

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

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PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER

WEATHER IS FOR THE BIRDS

By Martha D. Shulski

The spectacle of the sandhill crane migration is surely a natural wonder, and weather conditions play a role in the movement of these and other migratory birds. Nebraska lies at the intersection of the sandhill cranes’ summer range in the North American Arctic and winter range in Texas, New Mexico, Arizona and northern Mexico. Bird arrival in spring is in large part because daylight hours are increasing and temperatures warming, but the pattern of movement is not exactly a straight line.

Day-to-day changes in temperature, wind and sky conditions can promote or inhibit movement of these great birds. March and April are a key time of year for spring migration. Although during spring, and any season in Nebraska, weather can vary considerably.

Taking flight in the morning has been found to correlate with air temperature (birds prefer the warmth) or even

updrafts from the heating of the Earth’s surface. Overall, temperatures have warmed, especially in March, since about 1960. A recent study of whooping cranes found warmth to be correlated to migration patterns.

What is on tap for spring 2020? The current seasonal outlook from the Climate Prediction Center is alluding to a warmer March through May along the Gulf Coast and desert Southwest. This may push the instinctual desire for birds to head north. Transversely, the March and April outlook is showing a cooler than normal northern Plains.

Cranes moving north sooner than usual may find winter still grasping the Dakotas and leaving Nebraska with a longer crane visit. Only time will tell.

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



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SPRING SEASONS RUN
MARCH 25 – MAY 31, 2020



CAPE MAY WARBLER. PHOTO BY PHIL SWANSON

MORE THAN CRANES

By Joel Jorgensen

By the time most sandhill cranes and the hordes of geese leave central Nebraska in early April, the migration of many avian species through the state is either just beginning or has yet to start. If considering the totality of spring migration for all species, it can commence as early as late January for a few hardy birds and does not end until the last white-rumped sandpipers and black terns pass through the state during the first third of June. Thus, the ornithological calendar does not necessarily align with the astronomical one.

Many spring migrants are still moving north at the same time local breeding birds are incubating eggs or tending to young. If focusing on only individual birds, the majority of spring migration actually occurs from late April through late May when millions of songbirds such as warblers, buntings, orioles and flycatchers invade North America from tropical and subtropical clines.

These migrants may not produce the astonishing spectacle as a congregation of thousands of sandhill cranes or clouds of snow and Ross’s geese blanketing the sky. Nevertheless,

these small, brightly colored long-distant travelers can be equally as enjoyable to experience.

One spring migrant in Nebraska is the Cape May warbler, a striking yellow and black bird that weighs less than a greeting card. Cape May warblers spend the winter in Central and South America and the Carribean. Despite their small size each bird will travel across the continent in one month to arrive in the northern U.S. and Canada to breed. Every few days brings new arrivals that have been absent from our region for months.

Birdwatchers relish this time of year, and during the first half of May, the most ardent birders can tally a hundred species or more in a single day. Casual backyard bird enthusiasts can take part by putting out hummingbird or oriole feeders to welcome these new arrivals. From beginning to end, the migration of all birds in spring is something everyone can enjoy.

Visit birdsofnebraska.org for more Nebraska bird information.



Chadron State College students join Nebraska Game and Parks staff and volunteers to release a bighorn sheep ewe back to the wild after equipping it with a new radio collar near Chadron State Park.

We’re working to preserve beautiful Nebraska for years – and generations – to come. #MakingItLast

MAKING IT LAST





PHOTO BY JENNY NGUYEN-WHEATLEY

RABBIT AND DUMPLINGS

By Jenny Nguyen-Wheatley

Servings: 8

Prep Time: 20 minutes

Cooking Time: 2 hours and 30 minutes

Ingredients:

Rabbit Stock

- 2 pounds whole rabbit
- 2 carrots, halved
- 2 ribs of celery, halved
- 6 sprigs of fresh thyme
- 1 large onion, halved
- Cooking oil
- About 8 cups of water

Stew and Dumplings

- 1 small onion, chopped
- 2 carrots, chopped
- 2 ribs of celery, chopped
- Cooking oil
- 1 bay leaf
- 4 sprigs of fresh thyme
- Half sprig of fresh rosemary
- ¼ teaspoon of dried sage (or 1 large fresh leaf, minced)
- 4 cloves of garlic, minced
- ¼ cup of flour
- 2 tablespoons of butter

- ¾ cup of chardonnay
- 6 cups of rabbit stock
- Lawry's Seasoned Salt, to taste
- Freshly cracked pepper
- ¼ cup of heavy cream
- 1 can Pillsbury Grands! Southern Homestyle Buttermilk Biscuits
- Freshly chopped flat-leaf parsley

1. To make rabbit stock, heat 1 tablespoon of oil in a stock pot over medium heat. Add halved carrots, celery, onion and thyme. Brown onion on both sides, and then add the rabbit to the pot and submerge with water, about 8 cups. Bring to a low boil, then back down to a simmer and cover. Simmer for 1 hour or until rabbit meat becomes tender.

2. Remove rabbit meat from the bones. Return bones to the pot and simmer for an additional hour, covered. Refrigerate the meat until ready to use. Strain the stock and discard solids. Keep stock warm.

3. In a pot over medium heat, sweat

chopped onion, celery, carrots, bay leaf, thyme, rosemary and sage in 1 tablespoon of oil until onion becomes translucent, about 5-7 minutes. Add garlic and sauté for 30 seconds. Add butter and flour, and cook for 2-3 minutes, stirring constantly.

4. Stir in wine and let it simmer and reduce by half, scraping the bottom of the pan with a wooden spoon. Gradually stir in hot rabbit stock, stirring as you go, breaking up any lumps. Bring to a simmer and return rabbit meat to the pot. Season to taste with seasoned salt.

5. Cut biscuits into quarters or halves. Drop each piece one-by-one into the simmering soup. Cover and simmer for 25 minutes or until biscuits are cooked through; do not uncover the pot during this time to keep as much steam built up as possible. Stir in heavy cream and season again to taste with salt and pepper. Garnish soup and dumplings with parsley.

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NEBRASKA
— GAME  PARKS —

Our Family Prairie

A simple quarter section of land contains a legacy of family memories and conservation

Story and Photos by Chris Helzer

Back in 1960, my grandpa bought 160 acres of farm land near Stockham – a couple miles north of the farmstead where he and my grandma were raising my dad and his two sisters. Most of the parcel was in cultivation, except for several small draws (totaling about 26 acres) where isolated patches of native prairie persisted. According to family lore, much of the land was in pretty tough shape, with a lot of topsoil erosion

from the hilly ground, and most of it probably shouldn't ever have been farmed. Grandpa bought it because he needed grass for his cow herd and immediately enrolled it in the Soil Conservation Service's Great Plains Conservation Program. Using that cost-share money, Grandpa reseeded all but 49 acres to grass and installed a dam for a livestock pond.

My grandma kept meticulous records, so we still have the 1962



Dotted gayfeather (*Liatris punctata*) in the Helzer family prairie south of Aurora, Nebraska.



Paul Helzer (the author's Grandfather) stands in the newly established grassland in 1964.

G. P. REMMINGA, USDA-SOIL CONSERVATION SERVICE

receipts for grass seed, and I can tell you that the seed mix consisted of big bluestem, indiangrass, switchgrass, little bluestem, sideoats grama, western wheatgrass and a little blue grama. I even have a newspaper clipping about the project, including a photo of my grandpa standing in his newly established pasture. My dad used the northwestern corner of the land for a 4-H project, planting rows of redcedar, Russian olive and multiflora rose behind the dam, which he insisted was considered good wildlife habitat restoration at the time. Grandpa and

Grandma retired from the farm in the 1980s, but the land remained in the family. After I finished college and started my job as a land manager for The Nature Conservancy, I began to help grandma manage the property. Dad came out a few times a year to cut little cedar trees out of the pasture (which seemed fair, since most were progeny of the trees he'd planted for his 4-H project), and I helped Grandma manage the pasture lease and annual grazing plans.

I often reflect upon the legacy of Grandpa's decision to buy that

degraded piece of farmland and put it back to grass. Though I think he was motivated mostly by cheap land and a desire for pasture close to home, the purchase and restoration of that quarter section was an important conservation project. The grass planting reduced soil erosion and sediment inputs into the west fork of the Big Blue River, which is less than a mile downstream. It also turned 26 acres of isolated prairie fragments into more than 100 acres of contiguous prairie habitat. The plant and animal species that had been restricted to

those tiny prairie fragments can now spread out and occupy much larger areas, giving them a much greater chance to survive and thrive.

Beyond the conservation impacts, the Helzer Family Prairie, as we've come to call it, has had a profound effect on my life and career, and has been the source of countless memories for everyone in my family. After both of my grandparents died, the land was owned by my dad and his two sisters. The three of them were strongly committed to keeping the property in the family, and they worked out a plan

to allow me to buy the land from them over time, something I'm incredibly grateful for.

Ecology and Habitat Management

The Helzer Family Prairie sits in the transition zone between tallgrass and mixed-grass prairie. In a wet year, ungrazed portions of the prairie can produce big bluestem plants as tall as I am, but in most years, and under grazing pressure, the big bluestem and indiangrass heights are more reduced, and mid-height grasses such as sideoats grama, little bluestem and

tall dropseed become more dominant. Invasive species, including smooth brome and Kentucky bluegrass, have both invaded the site, along with sweet clover, and all three can be very abundant under certain management and weather conditions. The small patches of unplowed prairie on the site contain wildflowers such as leadplant, prairie violet, dotted gayfeather, white-eyed grass, ground plum, purple prairie clover and many more. Since 1962, many of those wildflowers have moved out into the former cropland, joining the seeded grasses. Over the last 15 years or so, various members

of my family have helped me collect wildflower seeds from other nearby prairies and broadcast them on recently-grazed portions of the site. Those efforts have helped speed up the diversification of the plant community.

For a relatively small and isolated site, surrounded by miles of cropland, our prairie has a surprising profusion of wildlife. Breeding grassland birds include grasshopper sparrows, western meadowlarks and upland sandpipers, among others, and I even spotted a greater prairie chicken during June a few years ago, which makes me wonder if that species is a periodic nester. Ring-necked pheasants and northern bobwhites are both abundant, and now and then, a few wild turkeys make their way up from the wooded river valley to the north.

There are lots of frogs in the pond/wetland, including chorus frogs, leopard frogs and a recent invasion of bullfrogs. They are joined by myriad dragonflies, damselflies, and many other invertebrates, and we have frequent visits by various ducks, shorebirds and itinerant great blue herons. We even spotted a big snapping turtle making its way toward the pond years ago, though we don't seem to have a stable population of any turtle species. Pollinators are abundant, including monarch and regal fritillary butterflies, along with several species of bumblebees and countless other bees, moths and flies. Judging by tracks in the snow and numerous burrows and mounds scattered about, our small mammal population is strong, and that helps support a resident family of coyotes, which are always a treat to see.

Because our prairie is miles away from any others, the chances of prairie plants or animals coming to our prairie from elsewhere are awfully slim. That essentially makes us managers of a prairie island in a sea of cropland, and we do our best to provide habitat for all plant and animal species because if

we lose any, they probably won't come back. Cattle grazing is our primary tool for managing habitat structure (see page 27 sidebar), as well as our primary source of income from the prairie. We try to provide areas of both tall and short vegetation each year, as well as "weedy" recovery patches, since those sites recovering from intensive grazing are where we see the highest concentrations of wildlife, pollinators and other insects. In any particular part of the prairie, the habitat structure changes from year to year. Those changing conditions help prevent predators or pathogens from building up and help to foster a diverse plant community.

Our grazing management improved a few years ago after working with Nebraska Game and Parks Commission and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service private lands biologists. They provided cost-share funds to help us install two solar-powered livestock watering facilities and tweak the layout of our fences. The new water sources allowed us to exclude cattle from the pond, which led to a tremendous increase in the number of wetland plants and wildlife species in and around it. Instead of a shallow muddy pond that was always threatening to dry up and



The cattle were very interested in this snapping turtle that was trying to make its way to the pond.

leave our cattle without water, we now have a lush and beautiful wetland, and we see more ducks and other wildlife than ever before. Changing to no-till farming on the crop fields adjacent to the prairie has also been significant; we see much less soil erosion from water running off those fields, and gullies forming in the loess soil have begun to heal.

Years ago, we got rid of the trees Dad had planted for his "habitat" project, but we still spend hours each year cutting little cedars out of the prairie. In addition to eastern redcedar, other tree species are constantly trying to invade our prairie as well, with honey locust leading that charge. Those deciduous trees take extra work because we have to paint the stumps with herbicide to keep them from re-sprouting after we cut them.

Apart from trees, we have other several invaders that keep us busy. We regularly spot spray reed canarygrass plants along the wetland edge to keep them from taking over, and keep a sharp eye out for narrowleaf cattails and other invasive aquatic plants so we can stop them before they become

established. Brome, bluegrass and sweet clover are so entrenched in the prairie that we just use grazing management to keep them from becoming oppressive enough to stifle overall plant diversity.

Like most other pastures in the state, ours has a few musk thistles to chop each year, though usually only a few dozen or so. We've had to carefully train our kids and lessees to chop only the musk thistles, leaving behind the native wavy-leaf, Flodman's and tall thistles. Those native thistles are among the best providers of pollinator habitat and wildlife food (seeds) in our prairie, and it's rare to see a thistle flower without seeing bees, butterflies, or other insects feeding on it.

We're also appreciative of many other plants others might call weeds, including ragweed, gumweed, snow-on-the-mountain and hoary vervain. All of them respond strongly to grazing pressure, flourishing in the aftermath of a season of intensive grazing, but fade quickly in subsequent years, as that part of the prairie is rested and recovers. When abundant, those tall



Blue mud plantain (*Heteranthera limosa*) is one of many wetland plants that has colonized shallow areas of the pond since cattle were excluded from it.



Upland sandpipers seem to appreciate the grazing management of the prairie.



Fitz, the family labradoodle enjoys cavorting about in the prairie.



The prairie is a frequent site of family campfire suppers. From left to right: John, Daniel, Anna, and Kim Helzer.

weedy plants, surrounded by short-cropped grass, provide fantastic brood-rearing habitat for quail, pheasants and upland sandpipers, as well as food and habitat for many other species of wildlife, pollinators and other insects.

Recreation and Family

While we do our best to improve the conservation value of our prairie, the site is most important to us as a family retreat and recreational area. It's only a 15-minute drive from our house, so it's easy to head out for just a few hours at a time. The kids and dogs love to explore the wetland area, either by wading or with the canoe we store

on site. Fishing is no longer an option after the last bullheads disappeared when the wetland dried up completely a few years back, but there are plenty of frogs and other critters to chase and watch. In addition, we rarely visit the prairie without making a small campfire and cooking hot dogs on sticks.

When I cut down some good-sized trees several years ago, we stacked the branches strategically, leaving hollow areas in the middle of each pile, and the kids used those piles as forts and hideouts. They also climb the few remaining trees on site, chase each other around with sticks, and



Anna Helzer holds a recently emerged green darner dragonfly in the wetland area.

even let their parents show them interesting flowers or tracks now and then. We've gone ice skating, sledding, hunting, camping and insect netting countless times over the years, and as my older kids are nearing adulthood, those activities rank among their top memories of growing up.

Despite spending much of my work week in prairies, I still love heading to the Helzer Family Prairie during my evenings or weekends. It's a great place for photography, or just to explore and see how things are changing. I've learned a tremendous amount about prairie ecology simply by watching plant and animal communities respond to both weather patterns and our management practices.

I'm eternally grateful to all my relatives who have helped keep our prairie in the family, and for the trust they've placed in me as caretaker of the site. I'm also proud to live in a state where the vast majority of land is owned and managed by families like ours.

Each of us has the incredible privilege and responsibility to maintain the health of the land in our care, and to ensure that the generations following us will honor the same obligations. It's a sacred responsibility that I cherish, and I hope it's one that my kids will as well. 🌱

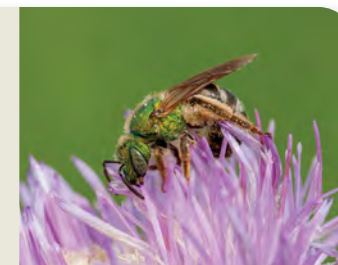
Prairie Management

The top priority for our family prairie is to optimize habitat for wildlife, pollinators and plant diversity. We graze between 25 and 30 cow/calf pairs on about 110 acres of pasture each year, between mid-April and late September. Our grazing strategies are designed to create a "shifting mosaic" of habitat patches that represent the full spectrum of grassland vegetation structure. Each patch has years when it is intensively grazed for most of a season, but also years of little or no grazing to compensate.

The current technique we're using is something I call the "open gate grazing rotation system." It's about as uncomplicated as a grazing system can be, but seems to cover all of our objectives. Our pasture is split into four big paddocks and a couple smaller ones. After quickly running cattle through several of those pastures in the spring to knock back smooth brome, bluegrass and sweetclover, we put the cattle into one of the bigger paddocks for a month or so, or until they've grazed most of the vegetation short. Then, we open the gate to the next paddock. However, instead of closing the gate behind the cattle, we leave the gate open, allowing access to both paddocks. As the season progresses, anytime the cattle start running low on forage, we just open another gate – always leaving at least one paddock ungrazed each year.

Leaving gates open allows the cattle to keep

Native bees appreciate the increasing floral diversity at the site.



grazing the paddocks they started on earlier in the season, helping to provide valuable short-stature habitat.

The initial paddock gets grazed hard all season long, suppressing the vigor of dominant grasses. In the following year, that paddock is left ungrazed and goes through a year of weedy recovery, providing excellent brood-rearing habitat for birds and abundant food and cover for many other wildlife and insect species.

While we're still experimenting with open-gate technique, I like what I've seen so far. Each year, the first paddock grazed gets the kind of season-long intensive grazing we want and then rests for the following season and part of the next. Other paddocks receive intermediate levels of grazing intensity and duration, resulting in a variety of habitat structure for wildlife and growing conditions for plants. The stocking rate of cattle is the same as what we'd use in any other grazing rotation, so I'm optimizing our income. However, instead of trying to graze the entire pasture evenly, I'm "overutilizing" some parts of the pasture and "underutilizing" others. Because the "overutilized" areas get plenty of time to recover, we're not degrading the long-term health of our grasses, but are sustaining high plant diversity and good wildlife numbers.



The 'open gate' management approach creates a wide range of habitat structure across the prairie, created by various stages of intensive grazing and recovery.

Outdoor Nebraska

By Renae Blum

With its typically unpredictable weather, March is good for both indoor and outdoor activities. Here are some activities that outdoor enthusiasts might enjoy. Learn more about park events listed below at Calendar.OutdoorNebraska.gov. 



Prepare for spring turkey season

Throughout the month | Statewide

Incredible opportunities await turkey hunters this spring. Set yourself up for success by scouting for a place where turkeys are still flocked up and getting permission from landowners. In the final weeks of the month, set up your blind near roosting and feeding sites and start hunting when archery season opens March 25.



Go trout fishing

Throughout the month | Statewide

Early spring is a good time of year to hit a trout stream, especially on sunny days when trout are more likely to be active. Watch OutdoorNebraska.org for reports on where rainbow trout will be stocked across the state.



View sandhill cranes

Throughout the month | Central Nebraska

More than half a million sandhill cranes descend upon central Nebraska this time of year, producing one of the most remarkable wildlife spectacles in the world. Places for viewing include the Crane Trust Nature and Visitor Center, Iain Nicolson Audubon Center at Rowe Sanctuary, Fort Kearny State Recreation Area and the North River Wildlife Management Area.

Nebraska Game and Parks Commission meeting

March 20, 8 a.m.
Central Community College, Hastings



Attend the Nebraska NASP State Tournament

March 21 | Lancaster Event Center

The National Archery in the Schools Program, or NASP, produces some of the best youth archers in Nebraska. On the 21st, more than 800 students in the program will gather for the largest archery tournament in the state. "It's a spectacle to behold," says Game and Parks' Education Manager Jeff Rawlinson. For more information about NASP, visit OutdoorNebraska.org/nasp.



Attend this month's Schramm Sunday Speaker event

March 15, 2-3 p.m. | Schramm Education Center

Learn how you can contribute to scientific research in Nebraska and beyond at this presentation, "People Powered Science," by Nebraska Game and Parks Watchable Wildlife Biologist Alie Mayes.

2019 FLOOD

Game and Parks Still Working to Recover

BY ERIC FOWLER

For many Nebraskans, 2019 was a tough year. Historic flooding in March sent nearly every river in the eastern half of the state out of its banks, washing out highways, bridges, dams, levees, farms and homes, and killing four people and countless livestock.

Flooding along the Missouri River in southeastern Nebraska continued throughout the year. More floods hit south-central Nebraska in July and the northeast in September. It is estimated that the flooding caused more than \$3 billion in damage to infrastructure and property in Nebraska.

Publicly owned lands managed by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission were not spared. Of the 76 state parks and recreation areas it oversees, 28 were damaged by flooding. So were 67 of the state's 289 wildlife management areas, several segments of the Cowboy Recreation and Nature Trail, and

numerous fisheries. The estimated cost to clean up and repair the damage adds up to nearly \$19 million.

For some outdoor enthusiasts, the flooding meant looking for different places to camp, fish or hunt, as many areas were closed for extended periods, some the entire year. For Game and Parks, it meant \$1.2 million in lost revenue from Park Entry Permit sales, campsite rentals and other activity fees.

The agency has worked to repair as much of the damage as possible, and has been formulating a plan to finish the work and return these resources to the condition that Nebraskans know and love. Paying for the repairs, however, remains a challenge for the agency, which is funded primarily by user fees. Those fees haven't been able to keep up with the needs the agency has, not only for expansion of services, but also for maintenance of existing facilities. With help from



PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER

A deluge of water and ice washed out Spencer Dam on the Niobrara River in Boyd County March 14.

the Nebraska Legislature in recent years, Game and Parks was beginning to make headway on a \$76 million backlog in maintenance projects.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency will provide considerable assistance, covering 75 percent of the cost of eligible repairs. It is hoped the Legislature will provide assistance as well. Getting that money in hand takes time. And with a considerable share still falling on Game and Parks, it will likely put some construction and maintenance projects that had been planned on hold. But the work will be done, because the resources, and the enjoyment they provide Nebraskans and visitors to our state, are worthwhile investments.

"The damage was major, but we were fortunate. No staff or visitors

were hurt," said Jim Douglas, director of Game and Parks. "Our staff worked long hours in dangerous conditions to evacuate several communities, staff worked hard to put affected properties back together, and hundreds of volunteers turned out to help clean up debris. We moved quickly to repair roads and other infrastructure, and upgraded electrical pedestals at several campgrounds. Our staff responded with agility and ingenuity, while keeping an eye on the future.

"This response reinforced a few things that have long been evident to me: our staff cares deeply about the resources we manage, the public cherishes our state's parks and other outdoor resources, and Nebraskans, by and large, value the Commission's work."

Parks

When rain began to fall on melting snow in early March, water that rushed into the frozen Niobrara River broke up ice that was up to two feet thick and sent it downstream. The pressure of the increased flows and ice proved more than Spencer Dam, built in 1927, could handle.

When the dam breached on March 14, it unleashed a 10 to 15 foot wall of ice and water. Below the dam, the Straw Bale Saloon and a campground were erased, and the saloon's owner, Kenny Angel, killed. Spencer Dam WMA, an area managed by Game and Parks and popular among catfish anglers, was scoured by flows, and the Highway 281 bridge washed out. As it continued to the Missouri River, the ice and water wiped out more bridges,

businesses, homes and farms. South of Verdel, a river gauge measured flows at 123,000 cubic feet per second where flows are normally 2,000 cfs.

One of those bridges was located about 35 miles downriver on Highway 12 at Niobrara, where the river crested nearly 7 feet above previous record. Videos posted on social media of the 450-foot span of concrete and steel floating away on a river of ice illustrated the power of the flooding that was already happening, or soon would be, across eastern Nebraska.

A mile downriver, a historic steel railroad bridge that now served as a link on a popular trail running from Niobrara State Park to the village of Niobrara was swept away, as were other bridges and sections of trail. Due



PHOTO BY JENNY NGUYEN-WHEATLEY

Flood waters pushed day-use-area picnic tables and debris into the woods at Two Rivers State Recreation Area.

Doing Their Job

The flooding that occurred last March in Nebraska was expected. The scale, however, was not. And as rivers crept out of their banks and topped and carved holes in levees, many people who assumed they would be safe found themselves stranded in their homes, some at risk of being swept away.

Game and Parks Commission staff, including conservation officers and fisheries and wildlife biologists, did what Nebraskans often do in situations such as this: they jumped in to help.

Using a variety of boats, staff braved rising waters, strong currents and high winds, dodging debris, fences and other submerged obstacles, to rescue 148 people, young and old, during the peak of the flooding, pulling some from rooftops and second-story windows. Numerous pets were given rides to safety with their owners. Staff helped evacuate several housing developments along the Platte, Elkhorn and Big Blue rivers.

Not counted in the above number were the residents moved from a nursing home in Wood River surrounded by floodwaters, and reuniting parents with children who were stranded overnight in a daycare in Fremont. In western Nebraska, officers helped rescue 20 stranded motorists on highways during the blizzard.

Work went beyond rescues. Staff helped evacuate some housing developments and fill sandbags ahead of advancing floodwaters, delivered medicine to those who needed it, ferried people to hospitals for dialysis appointments and to visit a cancer-stricken patient and more. In the days after, they used kayaks and airboats to rescue pets that were stranded when homes in Bellevue flooded while their owners were at work.

Levi Krause, a conservation officer from Louisville, spent four days using his air boat to help other first responders rescue 60 people and their pets, earning him an Award of Valor from the agency's Board of Commissioners and the Law Enforcement Commendation Medal from the Nebraska Society of the Sons of the American Revolution. Conservation officers shared the Lifesaving Valor Award from the Mead Fire and Rescue Department. All Game and Parks staff members who assisted in flooding efforts were recognized for going above and beyond the call of duty to keep people safe. Krause and others involved say they were simply doing their job, just like so many other first responders.



PHOTO BY DINA BARTIA

Conservation officer Travis Shepler (steering boat) helping evacuate residents of Seward who were caught unexpectedly in the floods of the Big Blue River.

to repeated damage caused by flooding and the high cost, it is doubtful that the trail will be repaired.

With the highway closed, a commute between the park and town that took minutes now took hours, and the park struggled to find staff during the busy summer season. Damage to Highway 12 west of the park wasn't repaired until May. With access difficult, fewer people visited the park and the village, and both lost business. When a temporary bridge was completed and the highway reopened in August, the town threw a party.

The Platte River crested at 4 feet above flood stage, an all-time record, on March 16 at Louisville. Fremont Lakes, Two Rivers and Louisville state recreation areas all sit on the banks of the Platte and were some of the most heavily damaged parks.

At all three parks, campsites were damaged by water, sand and ice, including Two Rivers, where ice sheared off electrical pedestals in the popular Cottonwood campground. Water rose high enough at Two Rivers to spill into the 10 Union Pacific caboose cabins, and roads were washed out both in the park and leading to it. At Fremont, several roads washed out, including the one leading to the Pathfinder Campground, forcing the construction of a new access road. Staff housing and shops were damaged at all three parks, as was the office at Louisville.

A new boat ramp and canoe and kayak launch at Louisville, part of the Commission's Venture Parks initiative, was heavily damaged. New launches were also damaged upriver at Schramm Park SRA and Platte River State Park, as were railings and bridge supports on the Lied Bridge, another popular trail link. The bridge, owned by the Lower Platte South Natural Resource District and managed by Game and Parks, will remain closed until debris can be removed and damage fully assessed.

At Ponca State Park on the Missouri, flooding inundated the Riverfront campground and washed out a portion of the road circling it. It also turned

PHOTO BY MARY SNOWDON



Slabs of ice remained on the trail at Niobrara State Park five days after flooding washed out a section of the historic railroad bridge across the Niobrara River that linked the park to the village of Niobrara March 14.

backwaters on the park's bottomland to flowing chutes, just as it did during the Missouri River flood in 2011, and damaged the boat ramp.

Flooding continued into November and December on the Missouri in southeastern Nebraska. At Nebraska City, Riverview Marina SRA, where the campground was damaged and four feet of silt had to be removed from the shower house, remains closed. At Indian Cave State Park, numerous mud slides damaged the boardwalk and covered the road to the cave. While the road was cleared and reopened in November, repairs to the boardwalk remain. The boat ramp remains closed.

The reservoir at Willow Creek SRA rose 10 feet, damaging most of the



PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER

Heavy rains in May, on the heels of a wet winter, caused numerous mud slides that damaged the boardwalk and covered the road to the cave at Indian Cave State Park in Richardson County. The road reopened in November.

campsites, destroying two fishing piers, damaging several breakwaters and, on the reservoir's upper end, a causeway that is part of a trail that circles the lake and links to nearby Pierce.

On the Elkhorn River, the bottomland portion of Dead Timber SRA was inundated, washing out the campground and the road to it, both of which reopened in late summer.

On the popular Elkhorn River Water Trail, three access points maintained by Papio-Missouri River NRD between Bennington and Omaha were damaged by flooding and closed much of the year.

More than 300 volunteers helped Game and Parks staff on projects at several areas, including Louisville and Fremont, in the months after the flood,

helping assure parks could reopen by Memorial Day.

There is still much to be done. Picnic tables, pit toilets, fire rings and other campground amenities will have to be repaired or replaced. Where campgrounds were under water for extended periods, damage to electrical service was costly as numerous service panels and pedestals will need to be replaced. In all, repair costs to the parks are estimated at \$7.7 million.

That doesn't include damage to The Cowboy Recreation and Nature Trail that spans much of northern Nebraska and was complete from Valentine to Norfolk. It was damaged in 170 locations, forcing the closure of five segments of the trail. Near Valentine,

a 100-year-old box culvert in an embankment is failing and causing the trail to collapse. East of Long Pine, another embankment washed out. Near Neligh, Oakdale and Norfolk, the Elkhorn River caused significant erosion on the embankment. Bridge approaches were damaged at O'Neill and Neligh. The estimated cost of repairs for damage to the trail in 2019 is \$7.7 million.

Fisheries

When the Platte River breached a levee separating it from a private sandpit lake west of Fremont, it sent floodwater flowing through that sandpit and washed out the embankment and road separating it from Lake 20 on the southwestern corner of Fremont Lakes SRA. Flows continued through Lake 20, washing out the bank separating it from Lake Leba, a private sandpit to the east.

That connection to the Platte allowed common carp, gizzard shad and other undesirable species of rough fish to enter the sandpit lakes. These species can disrupt an aquatic ecosystem by clouding the water or competing with game fish for food. Additionally, the flush of nutrients brought in by floodwaters can fuel algae blooms, another detriment to water quality.

Overland flooding carried rough fish into numerous public and private sandpit lakes along the Platte, Elkhorn, Loup and other rivers and streams in March, and again in July. Many of these lakes had undergone treatments to remove carp and had developed into excellent fisheries for largemouth bass, bluegills, crappies and other species. In many lakes, those treatments will have to be repeated to restore the fisheries. Once restocked, fish need at least three years to grow big enough to be coveted by anglers.

At Fremont, crews repairing the road along Lake 20 were forced to put culverts in to handle the water that continues to flow in from the Platte and through the lakes, putting work to



PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER

Record precipitation in early 2019 caused Round Lake on the Valentine National Wildlife Refuge to spill from its normal pool east of Highway 83 and cover the road between Thedford and Valentine, reducing it to one-way traffic from June into November. High water closed other roads in the Sandhills, including Highway 97 south of Merritt Reservoir.

restore the fishery in Lake 20 on hold.

Of the 20 lakes at Fremont, only two, Lakes 9 and 17, didn't flood. It also appears that Lakes 1 through 8 on the park's northwestern corner were spared from the reintroduction of carp. The rest of the lakes will eventually need to be renovated. Other work to improve water quality and fishing in recent years included the application of alum to tie up nutrients and control algae blooms. That work, which had been successful, may need to be repeated.

At Two Rivers SRA, all seven lakes flooded and now contain carp and other rough fish, including the Trout Lake. A renovation will be required there to maintain that popular put-and-take fishery. At Louisville SRA, all five lakes flooded but only Lakes 1 and 1A showed carp in sampling and will need to be renovated. Lake 2 may be treated to remove shad. Carp also found their way into waters at Memphis and North Loup SRAs and Ravenna Lake in March.

In early July, heavy rains in south-central Nebraska caused flooding on the Platte and Republican rivers and their tributaries. At Sandy Channel

SRA near Elm Creek, floodwaters washed out the main road into the area, which also separated Lakes 4 and 8. The road was repaired and the park reopened in November. Dikes separating Lakes 1A and 2 from the south channel of the Platte were damaged. Carp invaded into four of the eight lakes on the area, including Lake 8, which had water quality high enough that it had become a popular site for scuba diving.

Near Kearney, flooding on Turkey Creek west of town brought carp and nutrients into sandpits at Yanney Park, Kearney Rest Stop, Kea West and Bufflehead WMAs, four Archway Lakes and numerous private lakes, all popular fisheries because of the quality and the proximity to the city.

Harlan County Lake, a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers reservoir, rose 11 feet into its flood pool, inundating campgrounds, boat ramps and other facilities, limiting access to anglers for the rest of the summer.

In the Sandhills, precipitation that was well above normal for the year raised the level of groundwater and that of the numerous natural lakes

in the region. The flooding closed highways and county roads, making access difficult to some of these popular fisheries. It also flooded the cabins and concession at Big Alkali WMA, forcing the area to close for the year. While the campground has reopened, it is not known when, or if, the cabins and concession will reopen. With water levels high, plans to renovate more lakes on the Valentine National Wildlife Refuge were delayed.

A fish bypass built by Game and Parks' Aquatic Habitat Program at Spalding Dam on the Cedar River was not damaged, but the historic hydroelectric dam itself was breached in March. The Gracie Creek Trout Pond at Calamus Reservoir SRA will have to be dredged to sand that washed in during the flood.

The Valentine State Fish Hatchery and the Grove Trout Rearing Station were both damaged by flooding in March. At Valentine, dikes separating several ponds were washed out and others damaged, and several hatchery ponds were filled with silt. At Grove, a diversion dam on the East Branch of Verdigre Creek was damaged, roads



A culvert on the East Branch of Verdigre Creek at the Grove Trout Rearing Station washed out March 14. Quick repairs were required so hatchery staff could access trout in the raceways and ponds.



Heavy rains July 8-9 sent Kea Lake at the Kearney Interchange out of its banks, flooding the parking lot and boat ramp of the wildlife management area.



PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER

Floodwaters on the Loup River in March deposited feet of sand on the bottomland at George Syas Wildlife Management Area near Genoa in Platte County.

washed out and ponds filled with silt. To renovate and restock lakes where rough fish were introduced will cost an estimated \$1 million.

As for the fish in other rivers, streams and reservoirs, the effects of the flood are yet to be known. Creeks in north-central Nebraska, including Long Pine, Plum and Bone in Brown County, flooded, but most structures that had been installed to improve habitat for rainbow and brown trout were not damaged.

On the Missouri River, increased flows through Lewis and Clark Lake and five upstream reservoirs likely moved fish through that system just as it did in 2011. After that flood, paddlefish, pallid sturgeon and walleye stocked above the dam were found below it. Farther downstream, extensive flooding for much of the year led to increased production of blue and channel catfish, sickelfin chubs, blue suckers and other native fish that were able to spawn in inundated habitat on the floodplain. Fishing proved difficult to impossible for anglers, as river boat ramps were underwater throughout the year.

Wildlife

Flowing from the Sandhills and fed primarily by groundwater, the Loup River and its tributaries don't flood as often as rivers and streams fed by surface runoff. But under conditions such as seen in 2019, they do. On March 14, Loup River hit a record level at Genoa, cresting at nearly 7 feet above flood stage, washing out Highway 39 south of the town.

About 2 miles downstream of the highway, where the river turns north at George Syas WMA, floodwaters moved overland to the east. On the inside of the bend, massive cottonwoods and other trees were toppled by ice and water. Standing trees now carry scars where ice gouged their bark 8 to 10 feet above the ground. Sand was deposited across the bend, measuring 4 feet deep in places and splaying out across roughly half of the area's 700 acres.

In the middle of the bend, Game and Parks staff, knowing a flood was coming, had moved equipment onto work benches in the maintenance shop, thinking it would be safe. During previous floods, water had reached depths of more than 2 feet in the shop

and office. The new high-water mark is 44 inches above the floor. Flowing water undercut the base of a barn and damaged other outbuildings.

Floodwaters on the Loup continued downstream to the Platte. Near that river's mouth at the Missouri River, floodwaters topped a levee on the south bank, flowed through two private sandpit lakes and then across Schilling WMA. For the rest of 2019, the Platte was carving a new course to the Missouri through the area. In January, that breach was closed, a move made to preserve the integrity of the Missouri's navigation channel.

Schilling has flooded numerous times in recent years, most recently in 2011. Water had spilled into the office there three times, reaching a depth of 3 feet in 2011. In 2019, it was 7.5 feet deep. As was the case in 2011, water covered much of the area for most of the year, finally dropping below flood stage in November. Access roads on the area, including the main road leading from Plattsmouth 3 miles north to the mouth of the Platte, were washed out and massive amounts of sand were deposited on the area.

The same can be said for other wildlife areas popular among hunters and anglers on the Missouri, including Niobrara Confluence and Bazile Creek WMAs near Niobrara, and William Gilmour/Tobacco Island, Peru Bottoms and Langdon Bend, areas owned and managed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in the southeastern corner of the state. A full assessment of the damage on those areas has yet to be completed, as most were inundated throughout the year.

Some access roads have yet to be repaired and cleared of fallen trees and debris on many wildlife areas that were affected, a fact that made access difficult for hunters this past season. Berms and water control structures on wetlands were damaged as well. The shops at Syas and Schilling remain closed and will likely be moved to areas that are not flood prone. The shop and outbuildings at Oak Valley WMA, which sits on Battle Creek and also suffered heavy flood damage in March, may also be moved to high ground. The total cost of all repairs is estimated at \$2.5 million.

While wildlife was certainly displaced by flooding in 2019, populations are not believed to have been greatly affected. While some furbearers such as beavers and river otters may have perished when their dens were hit by ice, most birds and mammals are capable of moving to

higher ground. The biggest losses may have been due to the harsh winter. In the western half of the state, a few mule deer deaths were documented following blizzards, and bobwhite quail didn't fare well throughout the state. Wet conditions during May and June hampered nesting success for pheasants, quail and prairie grouse.

The flood and heavy precipitation appears to have helped some species, however. Threatened least terns benefitted from the increase in sandbars created on the Niobrara, Loup and Platte rivers. In the Sandhills, nesting success for ducks and geese was the highest it's been in at least 10 years thanks to ample wetlands. Duck production was as high as it has been for decades in Rainwater Basin wetlands, where American avocets and cattle egrets were found to have nested for the first time on record.

The changes to the landscape on some areas may benefit some wildlife species in the years to come by creating a maze of early successional habitat. On riverine areas where sand and silt was deposited, a flush of sunflowers and other annual plants will flourish. Willows and cottonwoods will colonize sandbars and other areas where deposited. On meandering rivers like the Elkhorn, Cedar and Calamus, new oxbow lakes and wetlands were created where the river cut across a bend and made a new course. **N**



PHOTO BY NEAL VAN WINKLE

Floodwaters from the Platte and Missouri rivers inundated the shop and office at Schilling Wildlife Management Area at Plattsmouth.

Historic Flooding

Record snowfall was recorded at many locations across Nebraska in early 2019. Cold temperatures in February kept most of that snow from melting, pushed the frost line deep into the ground and formed a heavy layer of ice on rivers. Then Winter Storm Ulmer arrived on March 13. The bomb cyclone brought blizzard conditions to western Nebraska, and warm temperatures and 3 inches of rain in eastern Nebraska. With the ground frozen, the rain and rapidly melting snow ran off into rivers and streams, sending a rush of water and ice downriver. Thirty stream gauges, including those on the Loup, North Loup, Wood, Niobrara, Platte, and Elkhorn rivers and several creeks, reached all-time record highs.

Total precipitation for 2019 was well above normal across most of Nebraska, and other Northern Plains states, with record levels recorded in some locations. That kept most rivers, including those fed by groundwater in the Sandhills, at levels well above normal throughout the year.

Runoff in the Missouri River basin above Sioux City nearly matched the record set in 2011, forcing the Corps of Engineers to release nearly more water than normal from Gavins Point Dam. These releases combined with high flows from other tributaries below the dam kept the river above flood stage in some locations for most of the year.

River levels remain above normal across Nebraska, raising the possibility of more flooding in 2020.

Bill Green a World War II Soldier

By David L. Bristow, History Nebraska

Later this year the world will mark the 75th anniversary of the end of World War II. Here is the story of one of the many Nebraskans who served in that war.

William Green wrote to his mother in Lincoln on February 13, 1945:

“Dear Mom,
“The way your letters sound, it looks like you’re not getting any mail from me. I’ve written quite often and they should eventually catch up to you ... Don’t for Pete’s sake worry about me being a casualty. That’s the last thing I thought you’d do.

Lincoln
13 February 1945

Dear Mom,

The way your letters sound, it looks like you’re not getting any mail from me. I’ve written quite often and they should eventually catch up to you.

Don’t blame me for not getting any mail, because I’m writing at every possible moment. You can blame the Army Postal Service and the U.S. mail.

Don’t for Pete’s sake worry about me being a casualty. That’s the last thing I thought you’d do. Maybe I’ll do what some people do, and not write the truth so you won’t worry. Some fellows do that and maybe they’re right. I can assure you that I’m not a casualty and I probably won’t be. I did cut my hand today, but it’ll probably be healed up by the time this letter reaches you. I didn’t cut in during enemy action or anything so don’t start worrying about that.

First page of Green’s last letter home, February 13, 1945. History Nebraska RG2025AM



Corporal William E. Green, ca. 1944-45. History Nebraska RG2025AM

Maybe I’ll do what some people do, and not write the truth so you won’t worry. Some fellows do that and maybe they’re right. I can assure you that I’m not a casualty and probably won’t be....”

Green was right about the slowness of communication. On March 14 his family received the telegram that no parent wants to receive. By then Green had been dead two weeks, having succumbed to wounds received while fighting on

the Siegfried Line, the bunker-studded defensive line on Germany’s western border. Green was posthumously awarded the Bronze Star and Purple Heart. He was 19 years old.

Worldwide, tens of millions of families were grieving in those years and for decades after. Green’s parents kept his letters, photographs, scouting uniforms and other effects. He had been a promising artist in addition to studying vertebrate paleontology at the University of Nebraska before he entered military service.

The family eventually donated the collection to History Nebraska; Green’s letters are digitized and can be read online as part of “The War: Nebraska Stories” at nebraskastudies.org. While it is impossible to collect more than a representative sample from the thousands of Nebraskans who served, the stories and objects of individuals such as Bill Green help personalize the overwhelming scope and vast numbers of World War II. [N](#)

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



Less than a decade separated Bill Green the Cub Scout from Bill Green the soldier. History Nebraska 9234-45

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Green’s parents received this telegram on March 14, 1945. History Nebraska RG2025AM

Those Alluring Orbs

When photographing Nebraska's great places, the moon and the sun are always welcome to the scene.

Photos and Story by Justin Haag

Whether it be the fast-beating wings of a zigzagging teal or the earth-hammering legs of a sprinting pronghorn, a quick “trigger finger” is often necessary for capturing imagery of the region's natural resources.

Perhaps no photo subjects, though, get me in hot pursuit more than two that are the farthest from the camera. One is about 239,000 miles away. The other, almost 93 million miles. When you're trying to catch them, even at that distance, each seems to move incredibly fast. What's more, they never pause for the photographer.

I'm referring, of course, to the moon and the sun. As a photographer, or just a person who loves to marvel at nature's creations, I thrive on those fleeting moments when one of the two most prominent features of the sky is juxtaposed with a beautiful Nebraska landmark. Our magnificent landscapes are just a little bit more magnificent with a big sphere hanging low above them.

Those who have experienced it surely agree: Western Nebraska, with its wide-open spaces and remarkable topography, is tough to beat for pairing celestial objects with terrestrial scenes.



I planned this moon shot to occur after a November afternoon of hunting ducks in northern Sioux County. The distinct landform is Sugarloaf Butte, which is on private property adjacent to the Oglala National Grassland. I didn't notice the bird perched atop the butte until I viewed the images on my computer screen or I might have tried to do something to make it stand out.



ABOVE: Usually, a bright moon is detrimental to capturing photos of stars. The “blood moon,” in which the earth briefly casts a shadow upon the moon, however, provided the opportunity to photograph Trunk Butte under the stars. Even though the moon is dimmed during the lunar eclipse, it still appears as the brightest object in the sky.

RIGHT: The ever-photogenic Crow Butte looks even better with a moon on top.

OPPOSITE RIGHT: Rugged Pine Ridge scenery paired with a pretty sunrise that even features an outline of the sun. What’s not to love?





ABOVE: With views of buttes in multiple directions, Fort Robinson State Park is well-suited for moon photography. This is one morning's view of perhaps the park's most-photographed landforms, the Red Cloud Buttes.

LEFT: While western Nebraska provides a wealth of opportunities for capturing the moon and sun, perhaps the state's best bet to get wildlife in the scene occurs along the Platte River farther east during the annual migration of about 600,000 sandhill cranes.

OPPOSITE: When the view is unobstructed, even much shorter subjects are game at sunset. This natural bouquet of western wallflower and other pretty plants was captured from prone position on the Oglala Grassland in May.



ABOVE: On an August morning at Medicine Creek Wildlife Management Area in southwestern Nebraska, the haze was perfect for photographing the sun. I was thankful that a mourning dove helped decorate the scene.

RIGHT: Of course, not only natural subjects are appealing when paired with the moon and sun. Tall man-made structures, such as the iconic water towers at Fort Robinson State Park, also make ideal subjects.



Tips for Photographing the Moon and Sun



- Plan your shot. A wealth of resources exist to help you know when and where the sun and moon will rise. I use the Sun Surveyor smartphone app.

- Exposure on lunar images can be a challenge, as the camera's meter will surely adjust for the moon's surroundings and deliver a blown-out white circle with none of the lovely cheese-like topography. Because the moon is lit by the sun, the "Sunny 16 Rule" is an effective place to start. That is, at an aperture of f/16 set the shutter speed to match your ISO. For example, 1/100 second for ISO 100. If elements in the atmosphere are making it less bright, adjust accordingly.

- For the best moon images, shoot during "the blue hour." That's the period of twilight in which the moon is low and the sun is below the horizon, yet provides enough indirect light to illuminate the scene with a blue cast. Ideally, the brightness of the moon and partially obscured sun will come close to matching that of whatever foreground element you are trying to include in the scene.

- Shoot in RAW mode, which will give you more capability to make adjustments to exposure and other settings later.

- Use a lens with a large focal length, essential for capturing the enormity of the sun or moon as it appears to your eyes. Most of my best moon shots were taken at 500mm. The bigger the telephoto, the farther you will need to be from your foreground subject. For instance, for the image of Sugarloaf Butte in this spread, I was on Toadstool Road at the ghost town of Orella, which is about one mile away from the butte.

- Invest in a solid tripod and cable release. Shooting in low light conditions requires long exposures and the most miniscule of movements will blur the image at a long focal length. To avoid camera shake, this is the time to incorporate the "mirror lock-up" feature, if your camera has it. I spend a lot of time cussing the wind, which is sure to move a big lens hood, during these shots.

- Be ready and willing to move. One nice thing about shooting these scenes in western Nebraska is that there is plenty of elbow room. I am always thankful, or at least hopeful, there are not people watching me during these shoots, because I surely look goofy running around with a tripod or two trying to get in just the right spot.

A Weekend of Exploration

My experience of Becoming an Outdoors-Woman

By Renae Blum



PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER

As part of the communications team at Nebraska Game and Parks, I have been aware of the Becoming an Outdoors-Woman Weekend Workshop for a long time, a three-day event featuring a variety of outdoors skills workshops for women. Each year I received e-mails encouraging employees to attend, but always resisted.

I'll admit it: I am not an "outdoors woman." My hobbies – reading, cooking fancy recipes, watching foreign films – are usually indoor ones. I also have trouble learning skills like dancing or knitting that involve physical coordination or mimicking an instructor's movements. I could see a lot of potential for embarrassment in this.

The thing is, though, I wanted to spend more time outside.

My job has convinced me that some of the best experiences in life can be found outdoors. So I checked out the workshop list. As it happened, there were four workshops that fit activities I'd already tried and wanted to learn more about (camping, kayaking) or wanted to learn (biking).

Being an introvert, I didn't relish the idea of going alone, so I asked my good friend and roommate, Emily, to come with me. She's not an "outdoors woman," either, but loves taking walks around Holmes Lake. She's also a steadying presence, easygoing and more impervious to potential embarrassment. If she went there was a good chance I'd have fun, even if I hated the workshops themselves.

She said yes.

Around 100 women attended the 2019 Becoming an Outdoors-Woman Weekend Workshop, an annual event that gives women the opportunity to learn new outdoor skills through hands-on workshops.



PHOTO BY RENAE BLUM

Volunteers demonstrated how to clean fish, and then cooked it for the women in the bowfishing workshop.

Day One

Driving into Ponca State Park, the site of the 2019 event, was the first sign I was going to enjoy myself. The park is thickly forested, with tall trees curving above the road. It felt like an outdoors getaway.

Our first workshop was on kayaking. I had kayaked once before, briefly, and still remember hanging on every word of the safety instruction, and the helpless feeling when my kayak was shoved out into the water. Once I was out there, though, I found that it was fairly intuitive, and was eager to try it again. This time around, I got tips on technique and buying gear. Our instructors, Christy Christiansen and Julie Geiser, were excellent, sharing stories of their own experiences along with in-depth instruction.

We had about one-and-a-half hours on the lake. With more time to enjoy the experience, I found that kayaking lent itself to something I was already doing in my free time: meditation. Everything slowed down. I became more aware of what I was seeing, feeling and hearing. It was just – nice. And unlike the typical meditation session, I enjoyed every moment of it.

Later, before dinner and wine tasting, staff offered white bass, bluegill, pike, crappie, drum and smoked trout just off the grill. It was my first taste of freshly caught Nebraska fish. If you've never tried some, you're missing out.

Day Two

Camping Hacks was our first session of the day, and I was hoping I could learn something my backpacking dad might not know. I did! For example, a mixture of candlewax and dryer lint in an egg carton makes great tinder. We also discussed ways to keep kids entertained during a camping trip and different food and water containers you can find around the house. It didn't translate directly to the backpacking Dad and I have done, but it gave me insight into something different.

Other Workshop Opportunities

The four workshops I selected, on camping, kayaking, bowfishing and biking, were just a few that were offered. A number of workshops had a hunting focus, such as Hunting with Handguns, Beginning Shotgun Shooting, Rifle Marksmanship/Muzzleloading, and Deer Processing. Those interested in fishing had several other opportunities as well, with workshops covering fish cleaning and cooking, fly-fishing and advanced fishing tactics. Rounding out the workshop list were sessions covering a variety of other outdoor interests: canning and preserving, birding and bird identification, photography, hiking and backpacking, reading the woods, and more. The selection of workshops differs from year to year; to learn what is offered this year, visit OutdoorNebraska.org/bow.



Volunteer instructor Doug Ellis of Allen teaches Liz Lancaster of Cody in the Beginning Shotgun Shooting workshop.

PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER

came away feeling that this was something I could conquer if I spent more time with it. Looking back now, what stands out to me is that these workshops weren't just meant to be fun, though they were. The primary goal seemed to be empowering women to create their own outdoor experiences when they got home, backed up with practical knowledge and hands-on experience. I'm not going to say that Becoming an Outdoors-Woman will transform you instantly into an "outdoors woman." I'm still deciding if I'm going to give biking another go, and would need more help to get into bowfishing. But Emily and I have already decided: We're renting kayaks and getting out on Holmes Lake this summer. I can't wait. OutdoorNebraska.org/bow

The 2020 Becoming an Outdoors-Woman workshop is Oct. 2-4 at Fort Robinson State Park. For more information on this program, visit OutdoorNebraska.org/bow.

History of BOW



PHOTO BY BOB GRIER

Carl Wolfe teaches camping and outdoor skills at the 1992 BOW course held at the Nebraska National Forest at Halsey.

By Julie Geiser

A program that is near and dear to me is the Becoming an Outdoors-Woman (BOW) program. I have been blessed to be a part of this program since it started in Nebraska 29 years ago and am proud of what the program has accomplished for thousands of women across the state. The BOW program empowers women to pursue outdoor adventures by giving them the skills needed to do so. An annual workshop is held the first weekend in October, and BOW provides many other events throughout the year. Nebraska was the second state to offer the BOW workshop. The program was developed in 1991 by Dr. Christine Thomas at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point College. Thomas' research showed that women would rather learn outdoor skills in a non-competitive environment taught by other women. The program is designed to break down barriers, allowing women of different backgrounds and ages to enjoy outdoor activities in a non-intimidating, friendly environment. The annual three-day workshop is a weekend of hands-on experiences, new skills and new friends. Activities such as archery, fishing, shooting (shotgun, rifle and muzzleloading), big game hunting, turkey hunting, photography, Dutch oven cooking and camping are only part of the line-up of classes. The workshop is held at Ponca State Park and Fort Robinson State Park on a rotating basis, which allows women to experience Nebraska's state parks in two unique settings. To provide women with the next steps for their outdoor pursuits, BOW has expanded with Beyond BOW. The Beyond program offers a series of "how-to" learning sessions that focus on outdoor skills and conservation knowledge. These classes are offered throughout the year, and women can participate in the entire series of how-to classes. Those with more experience can hit the field to go on mentored hunts, fishing trips, camping or kayaking adventures, to name a few.

Due to high winds and flooding conditions, our next session, River Kayaking, was cancelled. Pushing back my disappointment, I joined the bowfishing group. I'd tried archery once before, and though I had terrible aim and bruised myself with a mighty thwack to the arm, I wasn't opposed to trying it again. After wrangling with the equipment a little, I started enjoying myself. By the time we moved to aiming at a plastic gar in the river, I'd gained some technique and hit the target several times in a row. I found myself grinning, enjoying the adrenaline. Later, we relaxed by the shore, learning how to clean fish and nibbling on freshly cooked carp. That evening, the participants gathered in the headquarters to judge desserts made that afternoon by women in the Dutch oven cooking workshop, a delicious way to finish the day.

Day 3

Our final workshop was Introduction to Biking. I hadn't biked since early grade school, and to my surprise, it was harder for me than I expected. I struggled to get going, to stay upright. Tears sprang to my eyes. Instructor Jennifer Greer came to my rescue, taking me aside for one-on-one instruction so I could learn at my own pace. By the end of the session, I can't say that I felt totally confident on the bike, but



After getting familiar with the equipment, participants take aim at a floating gar in the bowfishing workshop.

PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER



JEFFERSON COUNTY COURTHOUSE, FAIRBURY
PHOTO COURTESY OF THE NEBRASKA TOURISM COMMISSION

VISIT JEFFERSON COUNTY

By Erin Lenz, Nebraska Tourism Commission

Historic downtown Fairbury has something for everyone. Rock Creek Station State Historical Park is one of its most popular destinations, which outdoor enthusiasts and history buffs alike will appreciate. See the deep ruts carved by wagons on the Oregon Trail and explore reconstructed buildings modeled after original structures that date back to the 1850s. Then hike along the picturesque Rock Creek and hear the story of how James Butler Hickok, also known as Wild Bill, began his infamous gun-slinging reputation at Rock Creek Station.

For more outdoor time, take a trip to Alexandria State Recreation Area where lakes, a swimming beach and great fishing opportunities will provide hours of entertainment. Its Snack Shack is open seasonally.

Other interesting stops in Fairbury include the city museum and city park. The museum documents the town's history and hosts a car show every September. The city park features a new aquatic center and a unique wooden playground covered with tall, shady trees.

Stop by Rowdy's for lunch, where its huge chicken fried steak called the "elephant ear" could satisfy the most voracious of eaters. Jalisco Mexican Restaurant, located on the square, offers old family recipes and is a local favorite.

Hometown Eatery is another lunch or dinner spot with its wide-ranging menu of bakery treats, Reuben sandwiches and pizza. Side Trek Bar and Grill in Harbine hosts a wing night every Thursday.

Fairbury is a great place to visit in the summer months. Don't miss the races at the Jefferson County Speedway, where the Jayhusker ¾ Midget Races are a hit during the County Fair in July; over 1,000 fans pack the stands during these two nights of racing. Or catch the Annual Motorcycle Show and then stop in for a drink at the Salty Dog Saloon in Steele City afterward, which offers live music in the summer.

Find small-town hospitality at the Nebraska Prairie Rose Bed & Breakfast in Daykin. One of the homes was built in 1917 and fully restored to its former Edwardian-era glory, featuring a beautiful wraparound porch.

Or turn in for the night at Grayhouse Inn Bed & Breakfast near downtown, Capri Motel, or Edgewood Hotel and Suites.

For nearly 130 years, Jefferson County has served as a meeting place for travelers and explorers. The Oregon Trail began the story and the community has since grown into the diverse destination it is today – perfect for any weekend getaway. See visitnebraska.com for more information.

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THE BLESSINGS OF BLESSINGS

By Roger Welsch



One of the great joys and comforts that have come to me from my 60-plus years association with Native Americans, starting with the Omahas in the 1950s and ‘60s, the Lakota in the ‘60s and ‘70s, and now increasingly during the last three decades with the Pawnee, has been the privilege of being present when prayers are sent out, blessings asked, and thanks offered, often sent on their way on wisps of cedar, Indian tobacco or sweet grass smoke. To begin with, there is the idea that as long as one is asking for the attention of Wakonda or Tawadahut, one really should say what needs to be said and not dismiss what should be a solemn exercise with a few curt mutterings. Very early on in my experiences in the Indian community I was asked to give a blessing at an Omaha Indian gathering. I briefly expressed my gratitude for the company, the food and our good fortune in being together, and in what I suppose was a minute at the most, said, “Amen.” As always, my Omaha friends were too polite to mention my inappropriate brevity but I could tell that the reviews were not good. I was not asked again to address Wakonda for many years. As one Pawnee wit explained to me, “An Indian blessing before a feast is never ended until all the food is cold.”

While there are many styles and forms for Native prayer, when it comes to prayers during Indian events, I now tend to be rigidly orthodox: I want the whole works, spoken in the old way, with nothing omitted. I like to hear a prayer started with a few minutes spoken in a language I know the Great Mysteries understand ... Lakota, Omaha or Pawnee, if for no other reason, just to hear the ancient words spoken again, perhaps words of respect or apology to the Great Mysterious or This Immensity or The One Who Made All This, even if the rest of the invocation is in English.

If the older, traditional, most complete format is used, smoke is “thrown” and words spoken – blessing asked and thanks given to the four directions: “The East, where the day begins, the year begins, and our own lives begin; the South, where day is at its highest, the year is at its fullest, and we are in the strength of our lives; the West, where the day draws to a close, year enters autumn and harvest, and we become elders; and the North, where night gives rest from the day, winter gives rest to the year, and where we all eventually find our own rest from the trials of life.”

But those are, after all, not the only directions around us, so blessings are asked and thanks given downward to Mother Earth, from which all our blessings come and to which we will return, and to the skies, from where comes the light and

rain that gives life to Mother Earth. (I am always especially moved at this point and silently offer my own thanks because my Omaha name places me within the KonCe or Wind, Clan, the clan of wind, storm, and sky.)

Then comes the part I appreciate most, recognition of all our fellow creatures, with our own kind included with all the others, where we belong, on equal footing since we are all in this together, not separated from all the others who share the earth and sky with us – “the two-leggeds, the four-leggeds, those that fly above us, those that swim the waters, and those that creep beneath the earth.” At this point special blessings may be mentioned or mercies asked for others of our “two-legged” species, living or gone “over the fourth hill.”

All requests and thanks are sent with the sound of an eagle feather “throwing” rich, sweet scent of “white” or “flat” cedar (*Thuja occidentalis*), sweet grass (*Hierochloa odorata*), or tobacco (often specially grown “wild” or “Indian” tobacco) smoke to the directions indicated. Depending on the inclinations of the person offering up the prayer, the name of Jesus may be mentioned during the recitation, but for some of us “traditionalists,” words in Native language loosely translated “This Immensity,” “Great Mysterious,” or “The One Who Made All This” pretty much covers the ground. And more.

And so the prayer ends with each individual having the opportunity to “bathe” in the cleansing smoke and perhaps say a few words expressing their own thoughts.

As a result of all this, when I hear prayers, grace or blessings offered in other than tribal contexts, I find myself wanting to issue addenda because so much seems to be omitted. And because I feel better when I am reminded of all those things around me that are part of my life. And everyone else’s lives, for that matter. And those whom my life affects. All the other two-leggeds in my life, and the four-leggeds, those that fly, swim, and creep ... Those that came before and who are to follow ... So after prayers in non-Native situations I often hesitate, perhaps only a moment, when everyone else moves on and I fill in the blanks with my own thoughts about where and who I am in “this immensity.”

And then when I get home, I may burn some dried white cedar, thanking, by the way, the tree from whom I gathered the incense. It’s the Indian way.

Roger Welsch is a folklorist, humorist and author who lives in Dannebrog.

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LAKE MAC UPDATE

By Jerry Kane

The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission voted to delay consideration of the proposed Lake McConaughy Visitor Management Plan at its meeting Jan. 22 in Lincoln.

Instead, Game and Parks staff will work with a McConaughy-area advisory group to come up with revisions to the plan and then present them at the Commission's March 20 meeting in Hastings.

Game and Parks has worked with local officials, park visitors and the public on the plan to make Lake McConaughy and Lake Ogallala state recreation areas better, safer and more family-friendly. The plan called for controlled beach access and designated camping to help ensure public safety and address over-crowding and over-burdened infrastructure.

"The issues and challenges identified at Lake McConaughy and Lake Ogallala remain," Parks Division Administrator Jim Swenson said. "The Commission has been tasked by Keith County representatives to address those issues and challenges. We look forward to working with a local advisory group to gain success in restoring Lake McConaughy and Lake Ogallala to quality and safe recreation environments."

Hundreds of people attended a Game and Parks



PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER

informational open house at the Lake McConaughy Visitor and Water Interpretive Center on Jan. 16. The agency also has been accepting and reviewing public comments about the plan.



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6 THINGS TO TRY THIS SPRING WHEN FISHING

By Larry Kurrus

I’ve been catching fish for more than 60 years, and I’m always looking for something new to try. Whether you’re new to fishing or “seasoned” such as myself, here are a few things you should try this spring.

Braided Line

If fish are breaking your 15- to 20-pound monofilament, consider 50-pound braid. It has the same diameter as 15- to 20-pound mono, with more than twice the strength for big fish. This line becomes handy when going after trophy northern pike. The only change you’ll have to make is using the manufacturer’s recommended Palomar knot. I made this change 20 years ago and have never looked back.

Spool Smart

When re-spooling your reels, do so with older line you’d no longer fish with first. Once you fill the spool, cast your heaviest lure as far as you can. Then pull 10 more yards from the

spool. Cut that line and recycle it. Tie the two line ends together – a blood knot to a Palomar works well – and re-fill the spool with your new line. This will save you money by allowing you to spool even more reels.

Crankbait Snaps

Tie a stainless steel snap to your fishing line, then your lure. This will give your crankbaits more action and allow you to switch lures quickly. They have worked most effectively for me when largemouth bass fishing, as I have had a northern pike or two open these snaps. Yet the reward drastically outweighs the risk.

Sleep In

In my early years, my friends and I would always be at the lake at sunrise or we were late. You don’t have to do that to catch fish. Let the sun get up, let the fish decide where they want to be and you go find them. The best time to fish is whenever you can go, not at dark thirty.

Start to Fly

If you want to change your entire fishing life, go on the fly. A good graphite fly rod is around \$100 and comes ready to fish. Watch a few online videos on how to cast and pick up a few No. 6 and No. 8-size black or chartreuse woolly buggers, and you’re ready for the lake. I use an old 8½-foot Pflueger rod I’ve had for 30 years and a 9-foot Dogwood Canyon I bought from Bass Pro four years ago. Both are all I’ve needed for trout, bluegills, crappies, largemouth bass, smallmouth bass, channel catfish and carp.

Change Your Life

Learn how to tie your own fly-fishing bugs and flies. It is the most time-consuming, aggravating and pull-your-hair-out undertaking – but oh-so rewarding. I started tying flies in the fall of 2016, and it was a total nightmare. All of my flies looked like bugs that had been squashed three times, but the fish still loved them. There’s no better feeling than catching a nice fish on a bug you’ve made.



THE AUTHOR WITH A CHANNEL CATFISH HE CAUGHT ON THE FLY. PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS

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- Papers about the impact of the U.S. Army and the implementation of federal law upon the fur trade and the Missouri River native tribes.

Email a copy of your paper, abstract or outline to Jason.Grof@Nebraska.gov or mail a hard copy to **Fort Atkinson SHP, PO Box 240, Ft. Calhoun, NE 68023** by June 1st.

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Visit us at OutdoorNebraska.org/FortAtkinson
Find us at “2020 National Fur Trade Symposium”
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*By Julie Van Meter, State Entomologist, Nebraska
Department of Agriculture*

Emerald ash borer is an exotic, invasive insect that was first confirmed infesting ash trees in Nebraska in June 2016. Since that time, the insect has been confirmed in several counties in eastern Nebraska. Federal and state quarantines are in place to prevent the spread of this pest by regulating the movement of potentially infested wood products. Regulated counties include Cass, Dodge, Douglas, Lancaster, Saunders, Sarpy and Washington.

Significant research into biocontrol organisms as a means of reducing the impact of ash borer infestations has occurred in the United States in the last 15 years. Successful ash borer biocontrol programs would reduce the survival of the insect's eggs and larvae through parasitism by these biocontrol organisms. While biocontrol will not eradicate EAB, it could reduce the EAB population to the point that ash trees are able to survive low level infestations. It may also protect ash trees so that regeneration and canopy restoration can occur.

Biocontrol is proving to be a valuable tool to combat ash borer infestations in parts of the U.S., and offers an exciting opportunity to combat the pest in our state and help protect Nebraska's ash trees.

Oobius wasp, *Tetrastichus* wasp, *Spathus* wasp.

In summer 2019, the U.S. Department of Agriculture released three biocontrol wasps in Nebraska, targeting ash borer. Though these small wasps love to attack ash borers, they don't pose any risk to people. *Oobius agrili* parasitizes ash borer eggs, while *Tetrastichus planipennisi* and *Spathius galinaea* are larval parasitoids of the target insect. The biocontrol insects were supplied by the USDA EAB Parasitoid Rearing Facility in Brighton, Michigan. USDA selected sites and made releases based on the USDA EAB Biocontrol program guidelines.

It is too soon to know if the biocontrol releases in Nebraska will be successful. However, the first two insects have been widely released across other ash borer-infested states, and research indicates those biocontrol wasps are becoming well established. *Oobius* is reported to infest around 25 percent of ash borer larvae at monitored release sites, while *Tetrastichus* has been found parasitizing 20-80 percent of larvae. *Spathius galinaea* has been confirmed infesting up to 50 percent of ash borer larvae at release sites in Michigan and Connecticut. This data suggests that successful establishment will be possible in Nebraska, which is good news for the state's ash trees.

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BUY LOCAL, BURN LOCAL.

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

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This photo was taken in the mid-1970s, when pheasants were plentiful in the Rising City area. It was opening day of the season, and we seven hunters harvested 20 roosters. On the left is our dad, Ellis McClintick, a WWII veteran now 97 years old. He doesn't hunt anymore, but does golf 18 holes three days a week. The other hunters are brothers: Phil, Tom and me, Jim McClintick. The most striking character in the photo is our German shorthaired pointer, "Duke." On this day several snapshots were taken and in each one, with no prompting, Duke planted himself in the center foreground of each one.

– Jim McClintick, Lincoln



These photos were taken in summer 1951 while fishing at Rat and Beaver lakes in north-central Nebraska. On the trip were Vera and Lyle Wettstead and my parents, Pete and Mary. Both men drove trucks for Harrington in Fairmont. Nothing but our power for the boat. The boy in the photo is Bob Wettstead.

– Jerry Gangstad, Fairmont



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.

2020

Spend Your Time Well

Make this a year to remember.

Reconnect with family and friends – and yourself. Watch the sunrise from a blind, the sunset over the water and the flames of a campfire in the dark of night.

Cast for lunkers and take photos of a first catch held high. Roast marshmallows, tell fish stories and explore places you've never been before.

Hike a new trail, visit a favorite park and start a new opening day tradition. Gather old friends to make new memories.

Enjoy this year, and all Nebraska has to offer – because time outdoors is always time well spent.



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PHOTOS BY JEFF KURRUS

BUILDING AN IGLOO-LIKE THING

By Jeff Kurrus

Last March my kids, their friends and I built an igloo. Well, not quite an igloo. More like a tall, heavy ice dome-volcano-type thing.

For more than 10 hours, we filled buckets with snow, watered them down with a hose (a very imprecise step) and built our walls. Then we periodically sprayed the entire structure down with the hose to help freeze everything together.

Because it was 10 degrees, we followed strict instructions not to spray each other with the hose, and with a couple of pizzas thrown into the mix, we had our outdoor activity for the day.

In the end, we made a fire inside of it, our neighbors shook their heads in dismay and slight embarrassment, and every non-participating adult questioned why we hadn't created a roof.

The other day I asked one of the kids if she was ready to make an "igloo" again.

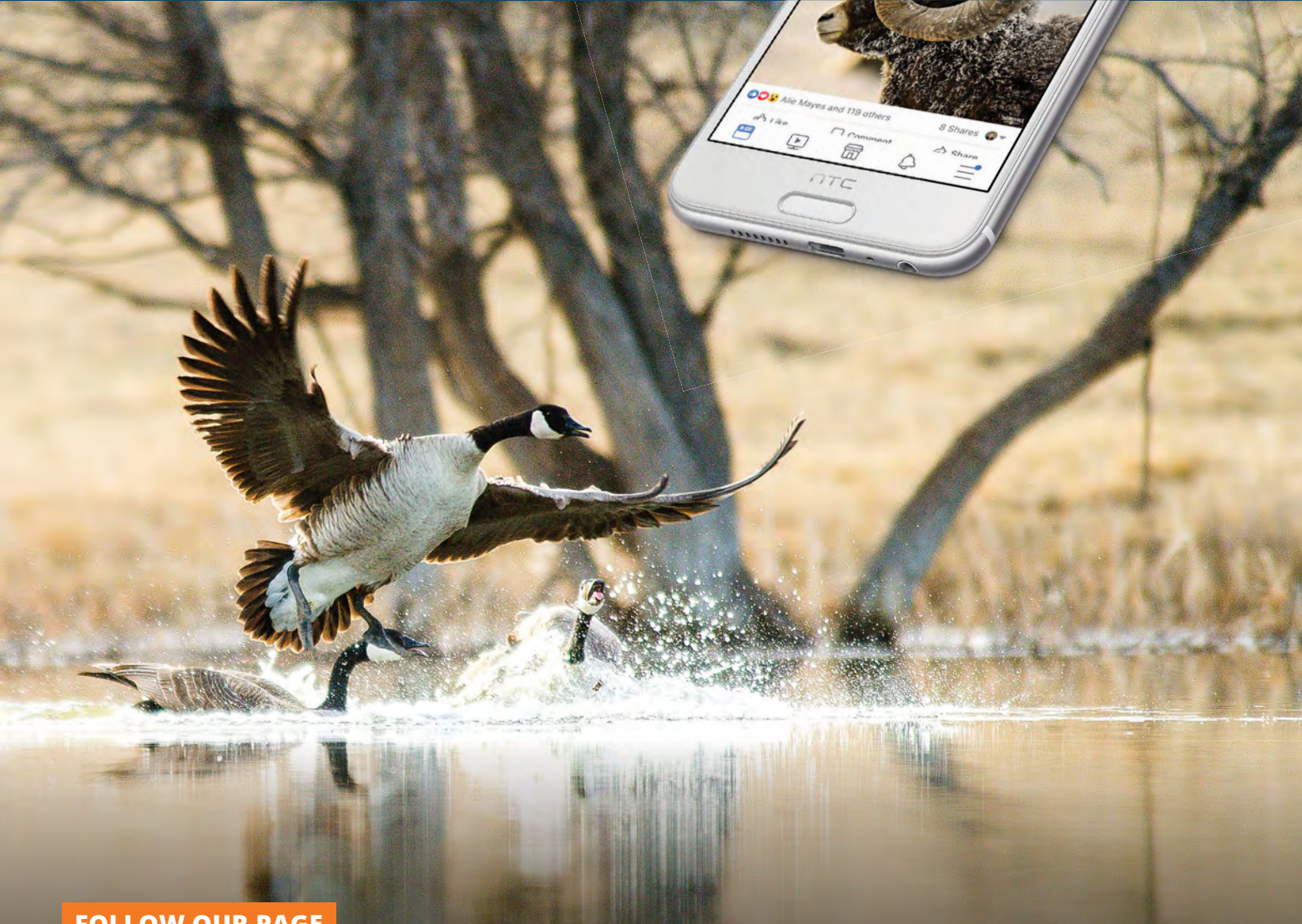
"Absolutely. That was so much fun!"

The truly enjoyable part was watching a group of elementary school students work harder and longer than I'd ever seen before.

I guess that's what being outside can do for them.



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