



# OUTDOOR CONNECTION

STORIES, ADVICE, AND INFORMATION FOR OUTDOOR LOVERS



The 21-year old 47" muskie captured last spring during the spawning season is now known as "the wanderer" for her documented journey this past summer on the Okoboji chain.

## NAIFC to hold ice fishing doubleheader January 14-15

The North American Ice Fishing Circuit (NAIFC) will once again be coming to the Iowa Great Lakes, but instead of a single day qualifier, competitors will have the chance to fish two single day, two-person team events called the Okoboji Double Header.



**Steve Weisman**  
Outdoor Editor

The first of the qualifiers will be on West Okoboji's Little Emerson/Big Emerson Bay and is scheduled for Saturday, January 14, 2023. The tournament competition will run from 7 a.m. with weigh-in at 2 p.m. Takeoff and weigh-in will take place at the Emerson Bay boat ramp. Rules include fishing only in the Emerson Bay/Little Emerson Bay area. Teams can combine to bring in their best weight of 16 bluegills.

The second part of the doubleheader will be on Sunday, January 15, and will take place on East Okoboji. Teams can weigh their best bag of 8 bluegills and 8 crappies. The take-off area and weigh-in for the East Okoboji qualifier will be at Parks Marina. The tournament competition will run from 7 a.m. with weigh-in at 2 p.m.

Rules include fishing from the two points east of Parks Marina all the way north to the Trestle/bridge.

Cost for each qualifier is \$300 per team. Each day the top 20 percent of the teams will qualify for the National Championship. Teams can fish one or both of the qualifiers. Registration deadline is Thursday, January 12 at 9 p.m. Interested teams can go on the NAIFC website: [www.naifc.com](http://www.naifc.com) to register.

The two events are sponsored by Stan's Bait and Tackle, the host bait shop, and presented by PK Lures and Ice Team. The mandatory rules meeting will be held on Friday night at 6:30.

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## THE STORY OF A TRUE WANDERER

By **STEVE WEISMAN**  
Outdoor Editor

Fish move. But how much, and why? That has been the ongoing question of anglers and biologists for years. Understanding fish movement can have large implications for management of species, highlighting the importance of seasonal habitat usage and sources of mortality. In particular, muskies are roamers.

We know that when the water is high enough, many may leave the Iowa Great Lakes and go over the Lower Gar overflow. In October of 2019, modifications to the existing electric fish barrier were made in an attempt to deter fish from migrating out of the Okoboji chain. It does not have the strength of the barrier that stops fish from coming upstream (bighead, silver carp) into the Iowa Great Lakes chain. Since that time, water levels have not been high enough to see how effective this system is.

However, studies have continued to help DNR Fisheries Biologists understand the movements of these fish. If there is an expert on muskie habits, it has to be DNR Fisheries Biologist, Jonathan Meerbeek. One of the most comprehensive studies currently underway began this past



Getting ready to place one of the acoustic receivers in the lake.

Photo submitted

April checking on the movements of adult muskies. This study follows the travels of 26 tagged muskies from their tagging beginning on April 30 and lasting through September 20.

### How it works

We've all seen the DNR boat

with the big antenna following muskies. This is a very time-consuming process that can aid in determining fish habitat usage and survival during typically only a snapshot of the day. But what about the rest of the day, weeks and months? A new type of technology allows

for continuous tracking of fish movements without lifting a finger through the use of technology.

For this study, the DNR strategically placed 19 acoustic receivers throughout the Okoboji chain (most were in East and West Okoboji) that "listen"

for fish that have been fitted with acoustic tags that are constantly emitting a unique code that can only be heard by the acoustic receivers. Once a fish is "heard" by the receiver, it records the exact date and time the fish swam by. Biologists can then download this data periodically and determine the long-term movement of fish.

Over the course of five months, 697,405 individual fish detections were recorded! Since, tags will last 4-5 years, this will give true long-term data that will assist in managing this unique fishery. Generally speaking, what researchers found was that muskellunge move a ton, both among the lake chain and even within an individual lake. For example, of the 26 tagged broodstock muskies, 17 moved from at least one lake to another over the summer, and one fish made 11 different trips between East and West Okoboji from May to early June!

### A wanderer's story

Perhaps the greatest muskie wanderer was tag #57715, a 47" female at an age of 21. She had been stocked as a yearling in 2002. Data collected over the years, shows she had been captured by DNR nets seven times between 2010-2022 and

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Members of the Silver Lake Improvement Association get a water's view of the shoreline restoration project on Silver Lake.

Photo submitted

## Ongoing projects in northwest Iowa

By **STEVE WEISMAN**  
Outdoor Editor

As we come to the end of 2022, I thought it would be a good time to look at all of the projects completed this year in northwest Iowa.

First, a major shoreline restoration on Silver Lake (Lake Park). According to DNR Fisheries Biologist, Mike Hawkins, "This was a pretty massive shoreline project. It covers a little over a mile of shoreline restoration." Prior to the shoreline renovation, there was a lot of collapsing banks and a lot of soil entering the lake. The Silver Lake Protective Association was instrumental in putting this project together and getting funding for it. Part of the project includes renovating the land along the shoreline beneath the native oak trees. A lot of in-

vasive plant life was pulled out from under the oak trees, and the goal is to try to maintain a native prairie under the oak trees.

A lot of bottom restoration also occurred in the shallows along the shoreline with rip-rap used to help stabilize the banks. Hawkins noted that this is one of the largest shoreline restoration projects the DNR has worked on.

An ongoing project is the Anglers Bay/Hales Slough restoration. This is about a mile long shoreline project to address the status of the hugely important bullrushes. Over the years, encroachment of invasive trees and vegetation, had put the bullrushes in trouble. It was all about getting rid of the invasive growth along the shoreline and up into the existing native trees to open up the

adjacent shoreline. It was also about stabilizing the shoreline and allowing sun to get to the bullrushes, along with bringing back native vegetation and the wet meadow along the shoreline. As mentioned earlier, this is an ongoing project spearheaded by the DNR Fisheries and Wildlife bureaus with help from DNR Forestry. Trees that are left include natives: bur oak, basswood and hackberry.

Garlock Slough on southwest side of West Okoboji by Emerson Bay has also been under renovation. Garlock Slough is an extremely important part of the watershed for West Okoboji coming in from the south. The goal is to make the wetland as healthy as possible for the water coming into the lake. The carp control system that leads into Garlock

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Outdoor Connection

# Iowa's late muzzleloader deer season underway

DES MOINES — With Iowa's shotgun deer seasons in the rearview mirror, hunting deer returns to a more solitary experience with late muzzleloader season and the reopening of the archery season.

Around 25,000 hunters participate in the late muzzleloader season which accounts for about 10 percent of the overall deer harvest. The late muzzleloader and archery deer seasons close on Jan. 10, 2023.

"We're right on track with the deer harvest as compared to last year," said Jace Elliott, state deer biologist for the

Iowa Department of Natural Resources. "The deer harvest during the first shotgun season was the highest in five years at more than 25,000, and the second season harvest was similar to last year at around 20,000. Iowa's strong deer numbers in combination with relatively good weather made for productive shotgun seasons this year."

Hunters looking to extend their time in the timber can purchase a county specific antlerless deer tag for the late muzzleloader or archery season currently available in 22 counties.

Counties with unsold antler-

less deer tags on Jan. 10, 2023, will be open for the excess tag January antlerless-only season. Only centerfire rifles .223 to .500 caliber with a published or calculated muzzle energy of 500-foot pounds or higher are allowed in this season. The excess tag January antlerless season was created by the Iowa legislature in the 2022 session. The season runs from Jan. 11-22, 2023. These tags go on sale Jan. 10 and due to the compressed timeline, they will not be available online.

Hunters may also participate in the population management antlerless season in Allamakee,

Appanoose, Decatur, Monroe, Wayne and Winneshiek counties. These counties met the requirement of having 100 or more antlerless licenses on the third Monday in December. Shotguns, handguns, muzzleloaders, bows, crossbows, and centerfire rifles .223 and larger may be used in the population management antlerless season. The season runs from Jan. 11-22, 2023. Tags for the population management antlerless season went on sale Dec. 19.

**Harvest reporting**

Hunters who bag a deer are required to report their harvest

by midnight on the day after it is tagged, or before taking it to a locker or taxidermist or before processing it for consumption or transporting it out of state.

"Harvest reporting provides us critical data to responsibly manage this population. Annual harvest is a major component of how we model the deer population in Iowa, which informs important management decisions. By reporting their harvest, hunters are contributing to the success of our deer management program," Elliott said.

To date, hunters have reported

more than 93,000 deer through the harvest reporting system.

**Chronic wasting disease**

Samples from more than 4,600 deer from across Iowa have been collected for chronic wasting disease testing. Of those, 1,100 samples have been processed, with 11 deer testing positive. Surveillance results are available in real-time at [www.iowadnr.gov/Hunting/Deer-Hunting/Deer-Health/Chronic-Wasting-Disease/Surveillance-Results](http://www.iowadnr.gov/Hunting/Deer-Hunting/Deer-Health/Chronic-Wasting-Disease/Surveillance-Results).

Nine of the 11 samples were confirmed positive; two sam-

ples are considered suspect and are undergoing additional testing. The nine confirmed positive deer was from Allamakee, Appanoose, Clayton and Wayne counties. The two suspect positive deer were from Allamakee and Plymouth counties. Plymouth County in western Iowa would be the 13th county where the disease had been found. Chronic wasting disease is always fatal.

Samples collected from the shotgun seasons are still getting tested. Results are expected within a few weeks. Most of the counties have met the sample quota. Hunters interest-

ed in having their deer tested after the sample quotas are met or have a fawn or other lower priority deer, have the opportunity to get it tested on their own. Step by step instructions are available at [www.iowadnr.gov/Hunting/Deer-Hunting/Deer-Health/Chronic-Wasting-Disease/Hunter-Submission-Pathway](http://www.iowadnr.gov/Hunting/Deer-Hunting/Deer-Health/Chronic-Wasting-Disease/Hunter-Submission-Pathway). Hunters will need to contact their local wildlife staff to begin the process. Wildlife staff contact information and unit boundary map is available on p. 52 of the hunting regulations.

## Love that sight fishing

By STEVE WEISMAN  
OUTDOOR EDITOR

Right before all the snow and wind arrived, I headed out on West Okoboji to see if I could find some bluegills. I was going to fish the shallows — in 8-10 feet of water. My first concern was ice conditions, but my grandson and a friend had been out the day before and it was he said it was a good eight inches thick. I went twice, and I was so excited to see clear, clear water. In eight feet of water, it was like a video game on a big screen TV.

I went twice before the next system hit. Not sure how the new snow will affect how I can pull my portable out. Just hoping on that one. With the zero and sub-zero lows, I found that it was making close to an inch of ice each night and by last Wednesday, the bays were all showing 12-14 inches of ice.

Sight fishing is the biggest rush in the world to me. To be able to watch the fish come and go, to rush toward the bait, to slowly fin their way and then back away, to turn and come back, to follow the bait up the water column...I think you get the point. It's totally awesome! The fish I kept ranged from 8+ to over 9+. Although I caught a limit each day, I rarely take a limit home, because I prefer to eat fresh bluegills, and 20 fillets will offer the two of us enough for a good meal and a good cold fish sandwich the next day. I heard good reports from East Okoboji by the Ritz, the bays in West Okoboji, Minnewashta and Big Spirit. I think if we don't get too much snow, it's going to be a great winter.

**The approach**

Tiny tungsten tipped with plastic, or a wax worm and



two-pound test always work well. My choice was either a gold or hot pink 1/32-ounce Clam Dingle Drop tipped with a wax worm or a Silkie. I found the bluegills to be throughout the water column, and I caught them a few inches off the bottom to up to four feet off the bottom. Down the road, as the winter progresses, I expect I will need to go with a smaller Drop jig.

Action was pretty consistent with anywhere from a single bluegill to several bluegills coming through at a time. Many times, if I had a single bluegill looking at the bait and kind of hesitating, and then another one entered the area, that

would trigger the first fish to bite. Or the one that just entered the area would rush up and beat the original fish to the bait. I just love that fish-to-fish competition. As always, sometimes the bluegills were non-takers! No matter what I did, they were not interested. I was reminded, once again, how important a consistent presentation is. If a fish entered the area and I was doing a little jiggle, jiggle, jiggle...I had to keep that up. If I changed anything, the fish simply left — not fast, just slowly swam away. Talk about fun! Just pull the top of the Trap over and a whole world opens up below!

**A last update**

So, how are things going since the big storm? Well, accesses are somewhat iffy with all of the blown snow, so you have to know what it will be like before you go. My suggestion there is to check one of the area bait shops.

I do know that the bluegill and crappie bite is going on East Okoboji between the Kum & Go boat ramp and the Ritz, Little Emerson Bay and the North Bay on West Okoboji and on Lake Minnewashta. Access has been tough on Big Spirit, but perch are biting, but there is a lot of sorting going on.



Fish stocking taking place at Little Swan Lake north of Superior.

Photo submitted

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Slough has been refurbished. A pumping station has been installed so that the water can be better controlled during both high and low water situations.

Access improvements have been made with new courtesy docks at Templar Park, the Upper Gar boat ramp and the HWY 9 boat ramp. The docks are those nice commercial style floating docks. More exciting news at the HWY 9 boat ramp. A new fish cleaning station is in the plans. The Iowa Great Lakes Fishing Club received a \$10,000 grant from the Walleye Weekend proceeds, which will go toward that cleaning station.

Anglers/boaters will be extremely happy with what has

been done on the west side of Lost Island Lake. A new double ramp and a new courtesy dock have been installed. The Iowa Great Lakes Fishing Club donated \$2000 toward the ramp and \$1000 toward the courtesy dock. At the same time, a new parking lot has been installed at Virgin Lake.

Iowa State University students are working on a study looking at the movements of Asian Carp near the outlet of the Iowa Great Lakes and the entire Little Sioux River. Of major importance is the effects of the electric barrier and how the Asian Carp react to the electric barrier. During high water, this is extremely im-

portant with as many as several hundred to thousands of Asian Carp below the overflow. If not for the barrier, the Asian Carp would be able to enter the Okoboji chain.

Shallow lake restoration and stocking have occurred on several satellite lakes: Elk Lake, Diamond Lake, Trumbull Lake and Little Swan Lake (by Superior). All have received fish this year: Little Swan, Elk and Diamond lakes have been stocked with largemouth bass, bluegills perch and northern pike, while Trumbull Lake has been stocked with perch and northern pike.

An upcoming project includes West Swan Lake (south

of Gruver). The DNR was able to utilize adult perch netted in West Swan Lake for stocking in the (above) lakes. West Swan currently is in a draw-down. At this time, a carp barrier is being constructed between Ingham Lake and West Swan Lake and new drawdown structure is being constructed at the outlet of West Swan Lake.

Another restoration is occurring at Virgin Lake, because shortly after the previous restoration, the DNR found that the carp had gotten back into the lake. The area from which they came has been solved. The re-set should occur quickly with restocking to take place as soon as next year.

## Black Hawk Lake restoration efforts receive national recognition

DES MOINES — Project partners behind a major restoration effort to improve water quality in Black Hawk Lake, located in Sac County, received national recognition for their achievements.

The Black Hawk Lake Watershed Project, The City of Lake View, and the Black Hawk Lake Protective Association (BHLPA) received the 2022 North American Lake Management Society's Appreciation Award for a Lake Management Success Story. The Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR), the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Sac County Soil and Water Conservation District, and other agencies partnered with the award recipients on the project.

"Black Hawk Lake has a long history of water quality challenges," said Michelle Balmer, with the DNR's Lake Restoration Program. "But the collective efforts of the watershed project, the City of Lake View, and the LPA have helped to improve water quality in the lake and promote awareness throughout the watershed of what can be achieved when everyone works together."

Partners began working together in 2008 to develop a long-term restoration plan for Black Hawk Lake, starting with

a Diagnostic and Feasibility Study and culminating with a watershed and restoration action plan. The Black Hawk Lake Watershed Project, funded by a US EPA Section 319 grant administered by the Iowa DNR, began in 2012. Since the project's inception, more than 211 practices have been installed in the watershed, resulting in a 4,369-ton reduction in the annual amount of sediment and a 9,390-pound reduction in the amount of phosphorus that entered the lake. Additionally, the City of Lake View has worked to reduce stormwater runoff to the lake by investing in numerous urban practices including bioswales, a wet detention pond, and rain gardens. This reduction in nutrients represents more than 56 percent of the phosphorus reduction goals outlined in the watershed plan. Phosphorus is the key nutrient fueling algae blooms in lakes.

"The success of the Black Hawk Lake Watershed Project has been through building long term partnerships," said Ethan Thies, project coordinator for the Black Hawk Lake Watershed Project. "Project support has come from federal, state, and local agencies, however, none of this would be possible without the participation of the LPA, the City of Lake View, and of course watershed residents. This watershed proj-

ect is a fantastic example of groups coming together to improve a public resource."

The City of Lake View and the BHLPA also invested in an ADA fishing pier and fish cleaning station to improve recreational opportunities at the lake in 2012. Since the project began, vegetation has returned to the lake, water clarity has improved, and fewer algae blooms have been observed. The sport fishery has also improved, with large communities of walleye, panfish, and muskellunge available for anglers. The lake is also drawing an average of 20,000 more visitors annually today than in 2014 (CARD study for 2014 and 2019), which bolsters the local economy.

As the lake has changed from a turbid water system dominated by cyanobacteria to one with an abundance of vegetation, the City and the BHLPA have been amazing partners to address excessive vegetation within the lake. The City operates and maintains a vegetation harvester as needed, and the BHLPA works with the local fisheries biologist to develop and fund a vegetation management plan for the lake that works for both recreational boaters and provides habitat for aquatic life. Together, these two partners have invested more than \$50,000 in vegetation management efforts at

Black Hawk Lake.

Today, the City and the BHLPA continue to work with the DNR to implement additional restoration practices in the lake. Dredging in the main body, which began in the summer of 2022, will remove 750,000 cubic yards of sediment, reducing internal loading significantly. The BHLPA raised significant funds to assist with dredging efforts and has led the way to support long term vegetation management at the lake.

"It is great to be recognized," said City of Lake View Mayor John Westergaard. "But the recognition really goes to the great partners and all who support Black Hawk Lake." He went on to say, "When we met for the first time thirteen years ago, the DNR said that successful projects are locally driven, and our community really took that to heart. The Black Hawk Lake Project is now held as an example of how strong public support can make a large project happen."

The North American Lake Management Society, whose mission is to forge partnerships among citizens, scientists, and professionals to foster the management and protection of lakes and reservoirs, presents the Lake Management Success Story Appreciation Award annually to a project or group nominated by its membership.

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spawned during at least four of those years. All her captures came from East Okoboji Lake.

This is the story of her journey beginning on April 30...

After being spawned, she was stocked back into East Okoboji Lake at the HWY 9 boat ramp. She stayed there until May 2 and then moved to the Stony Point area until May 6. Between May 6 and May 23, she made five different trips from Stony Point all the way to the lower end of East Okoboji. Meerbeek said, "It was like

she was doing hot laps!" From May 24 through May 26, she went from the HWY 9 Bridge area to the Triggs Bay area near the Trestle.

Then on May 27, she entered West Okoboji's Smiths Bay. In less than 12 hours, she went all the way to the north end of West to the Triboji area. She stayed there until early June. From June 3-8, she made three trips from the North Bay to Atwell's Point and back.

From June 9-15, she was at Atwell's Point and traveled to

Fort Dodge. Then from June 15-18, she was back at the North Bay. Suddenly, she headed south to Millers Bay. From June 19th to September 20th, the fish roamed around the southern half of West Okoboji Lake, never residing anywhere longer than a few days. This was perhaps the most interesting observation, as large female muskellunge are traditionally thought to be more reclusive and limited in their movements during summer. She, to say the least, was neither!

Then came September 14, when she made a trip to East Okoboji for 21 hours and then headed back to Smiths Bay.

ALL TOTAL: 36,282 detections and she was detected on all but five days of the study! What detailed data! Over the course of the next four to five years, think of the data that can be collected and what the biologists will learn about musky habits.

and now they get the chance to tackle the gills and crappies on East Okoboji."

Entry forms can be found at [www.naifc.com](http://www.naifc.com). For more information, contact or stop in at Stan's Bait and Tackle.

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p.m. at Parks Marina.

These qualifiers are part of the NAIFC's tournament series with several qualifying ice fishing events held in several states across the ice belt beginning in January and lasting into March with the Championship held the following December.

It is a two-person partner tournament with a team entry fee of \$300 per qualifier. Up to 50 teams can fish the qualifiers.

Tournament Director Mike Howe hopes to have 40-50 teams participating at the Okoboji doubleheader and encourages local anglers to give

the qualifiers a shot.

"I think the NAIFC is accessible and doable for any ice angler over 18 years of age. We had a good turnout in 2022, and I know that our traveling teams are excited to come to West Lake Okoboji to sight fish and enjoy Okoboji's clear waters,

Outdoor Connection

# Small details for bigger fishing catches

By Bob Jensen  
FISHING THE MIDWEST FISHING TEAM

People who fish, whether in open water or through the ice, often try to learn what they can do to catch more fish. Maybe it's a lure, a lure color, or the way the lure is moved. Maybe it's the type of minnow or the size of the leech that's on your hook. Those are all important considerations, but the reality is that there usually is no one special thing that we can do to catch more fish.

However, there are a bunch of little things that will enable us to be more successful on open water or the ice. Following are some small things that can have a positive impact on our ice fishing catches. You might be surprised at some of them, but when put into practice, you might also be surprised at their effectiveness.

John Crane is an angler who notices little things that help him catch more fish. J.C. says that when he's ice fishing, he moves from hole to hole with some equipment in a bucket, and when he stops at a hole to fish, he sits on the bucket. He says that how he sits on the bucket is an important consideration. A sonar is a very important tool for determining if fish are present and how they respond to a bait.

J.C. positions himself so that his body is between the sonar unit and the sun. The Vexilar FLX-28 that he uses is easy to see when the sun is shining on it, but when it's shaded with J.C.'s body, it's even easier to see. A small detail but an important one.

Here's another idea from Crane for bucket-sitters. If there's some wind, sit on your bucket so the wind doesn't hit your line. If the wind hits your line, it puts action on your bait that might not be wanted. Also, oftentimes the only indication of a fish taking a lure is a slight twitch of the line, and wind on your line can make it harder to see those twitches.

The same things apply if you're fishing from a portable shelter. If you don't want to pull the cover over completely, situate the shelter or put the cover up so your line is shielded from the wind or your sonar from the sun. A small detail, but an important one.

Matt Johnson is another ice angler who notices things. He's noticed in the past few years that ice anglers are using longer rods. Ice anglers who fish outside of a shelter have gone to longer rods because of the wind thing.

When an angler is standing next to a hole in the ice, a longer rod enables the angler to get the tip of the rod closer to the hole. Therefore, less line is exposed to the wind and subtle strikes will be more noticeable. And there will be less unwanted action on the lure.

Many panfish anglers are using rods 32 to 36 inches long. Scepter Sticks and Dave Genz Split Handle Rods are available in the best lengths and actions and have become the favorites of many ice anglers. Shorter rods are preferred when fishing inside portable shelters because longer rods are more prone to hit the ceiling tubes on a hookset. That limits the effec-



Veteran ice angler Steve Weisman uses his Clam portable to help him see the light bites. Here, he holds a nice crappie taken on a tiny tungsten jig.

Photo by Bob Jensen

tiveness of the hookset and is hard on rod tips.

Anglers who spend much time on the ice know that weather can affect fish under

that ice. Johnson favors some weather conditions for ice fishing. He tries to get out when the weather has been stable for several days. He likes tem-

peratures in the 15 to 25 degree range, and he also likes a light snowfall. Matt suggests that anglers go fishing whenever they can, but if you can choose

your time, choose 15 to 25 degrees and stable weather.

There are no magical things that an angler can do to increase their fishing success, but

there are a lot of little things that are easy to overlook. Pay attention to the little things when you're on the ice, in a boat, or wading a river and you

might surprise yourself at what you notice that makes for better fishing success.

**Iowa DNR  
ACCEPTING  
COMMENTS ON  
PROPOSED NEW  
ARMED FORCES  
FISHING LICENSES**

DES MOINES — The Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is accepting comments on the proposed new armed forces fishing licenses, through Jan. 24.

2022 Iowa Acts Senate File 581, passed and signed into law on June 17, 2022, broadens the qualifications for who may obtain a lifetime trout fishing license to include Iowa residents who qualify for the disabled veteran homestead credit under section 425.15. The lifetime trout fishing fee is \$63.

2022 Iowa Acts Senate File 2383, passed and signed into law on June 16, 2022, establishes a new annual armed forces fishing license and a new annual armed forces hunting and fishing combined license to be issued to any resident of Iowa who has served in the armed forces of the United States on federal active duty. The fee for each new veteran license is \$5.

Comments on the proposed new armed forces fishing licenses may be submitted through Jan. 24 via email to fisheries@dnr.iowa.gov or by mail to Joe Larscheid, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, Wallace State Office Building, 502 East Ninth Street, Des Moines, Iowa 50319-0034.

The DNR has scheduled a public hearing at 10 a.m. on Jan. 24 via conference call. Individuals who wish to attend the conference call must contact Joe Larscheid at Fisheries@dnr.iowa.gov. A conference call number will be provided prior to the public hearing. Persons who wish to make oral comments during the conference call must submit a request to Joe Larscheid prior to the public hearing. They will be asked to state their names for the record and to confine their remarks to the proposed fee for the new veteran licenses.

Any persons who intend to attend the conference call and have special requirements, such as those related to hearing or mobility impairments, should contact the DNR or ADA Coordinator at 515-725-8200, Relay Iowa TTY Service 800-735-7942, or Webmaster@dnr.iowa.gov, and advise of specific needs.

This formal comment period is an opportunity for stakeholders to help set the fee for the new lifetime trout fishing license. After considering public input, the DNR will finalize this rule and present it to the Natural Resource Commission for approval.

For more information, please contact Joe Larscheid by email at Fisheries@dnr.iowa.gov or by phone at 515-201-3376.

## Iowa's brook trout thrive in NE Iowa streams thanks to restoration efforts



### Winter community trout stockings start Jan. 14

DES MOINES — Years of work to protect and enhance the South Pine Creek watershed in Winneshiek County has allowed Iowa's only native trout to thrive and continue to naturally reproduce in that stream.

In 1994, a genetically-distinct strain of healthy brook trout was found in South Pine Creek, a tiny string of water buried between lush vegetation. These brook trout have likely called this place home since before the first European settlers came to the region.

DNR fisheries staff take special care when spawning South Pine brook trout. Instead of spawning the fish in the hatchery, like they do with domesticated strains of rainbow trout, technicians go on site and spawn the fish on the river bank and bring the eggs back to the hatchery.

"The eggs are hatched and raised to about 2 inches in size, and reintroduced into other streams to protect this unique Iowa ancestry of brook trout from a catastrophic loss if it was to occur on South Pine Creek," said Michael Siepker, fisheries biologist with the Iowa DNR's Chuck Gipp Decorah Fish Hatchery.

Siepker estimates that there are about 500 miles of coldwater streams in northeast Iowa. Not every mile is suitable for brook trout, but there are many miles where brook trout can be stocked. "Iowans deserve to have these beautiful native brook trout in any place that we can have them," Siepker said. The ability to sustain trout indicates great stream improvement, as they're an indicator species of northeast Iowa's streams, demanding the cold-

est and cleanest waters to prosper. DNR staff consider water temperature, water monitoring results, current fish populations and streambank erosion data before stocking trout in a stream.

"Our capacity to restore brook trout is fairly limited to the number of eggs we can collect from South Pine," explains Siepker. "We have about 12,000 fingerlings a year that we can use for restoration stockings in about ten sites."

Brook trout are stocked into a new stream with suitable habitat three consecutive years to try to establish a strong and healthy population. About three years after the last stocking, fisheries staff sample the stream to see if there are young brook trout in the stream. The process to determine where this colorful trout that is

part of Iowa's history is stocked is a complex process that involves a lot of partners. "The areas that are determined viable to reintroduce brook trout have undergone significant conservation work to reduce bacteria and sediment," said Steve Hopkins with the DNR's Water Quality Bureau. In some streams, it's been decades since trout have been able to naturally reproduce and survive.

Before work began on watersheds such as the Yellow River Headwaters and Silver Creek in Winneshiek and Howard counties, excess bacteria and sediment runoff primarily from farmlands, unstable streambanks, and pastures contributed to elevated temperatures and pollution in streams, creating an unsuitable habitat for trout. Grants from Section 319 of the Clean Water Act have fund-

ed land improvement efforts on these watersheds, such as stabilizing streambanks, restoring floodplains, and soil conservation and soil health practices. The DNR has also worked with landowners to reduce the amount of livestock manure that could run into streams and cause the growth of algae and bacteria.

Although the watershed project goals were to reduce bacteria, sediment reduction most benefited the trout. The best management practices, such as cover crops and improved manure storage, and terraces, also helped reduce sediment to those waters, which improved habitat for trout.

Trout lay their eggs in gravel so clear conditions are critical - sediment can smother the eggs and prevent new trout from hatching.

"When you have improved water quality and habitat you have more robust trout populations," said Mike Steuck, Northeast Iowa fisheries supervisor. "They can successfully reproduce on their own and we don't have to stock them. We can put our resources into more habitat or stocking other streams that are of lesser quality."

Healthier streams have been able to support larger and naturally reproducing populations of trout. As work in watersheds to reduce sediment delivery to the streams continues and expands, there is a new goal: To restore native South Pine Brook Trout populations in those clear, cold streams.

"Because of less sediment and better habitat, streams have trout that are reproducing on their own," Steuck said.

DES MOINES — The Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) will release trout in five locations across Iowa this winter in areas that would not support them during warmer months.

Winter trout stockings are a great place to take kids to catch their first fish. A small split shot and a hook with almost any kind of bait will catch trout.

The popular program is supported by the sales of the trout fee. Anglers need a valid fishing license and pay the trout fee to fish for or possess trout. The daily limit is five trout per licensed angler with a possession limit of 10.

Children age 15 or younger can fish for trout with a properly licensed adult, but they must limit their catch to one daily limit. They can buy a trout fee which will allow them to catch their own limit.

Winter trout stocking events are dependent on favorable weather and safe ice conditions. Check the DNR Trout Fishing website at www.iowadnr.gov/trout for possible changes to the schedule.

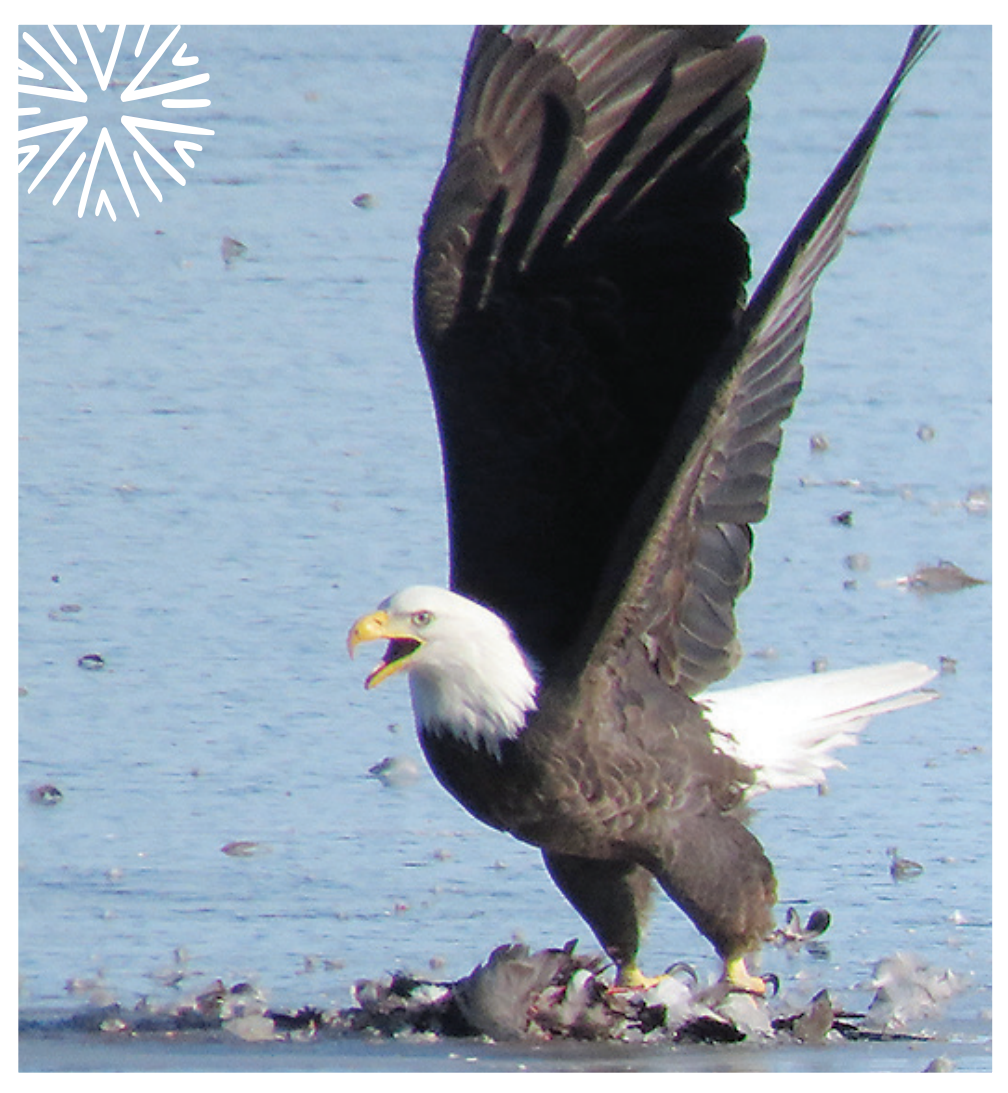
The annual winter community trout stocking will take place at Scharnberg Pond, located southeast of Everly on Saturday, January 21 at 12:30 p.m.



Bald Eagle  
**WILDLIFE**  
**PHOTOS**  
 JANUARY '23

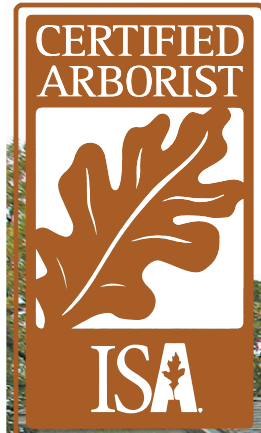


All photos taken at East Okoboji in early December  
 Photos by Mike Fredrickson



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