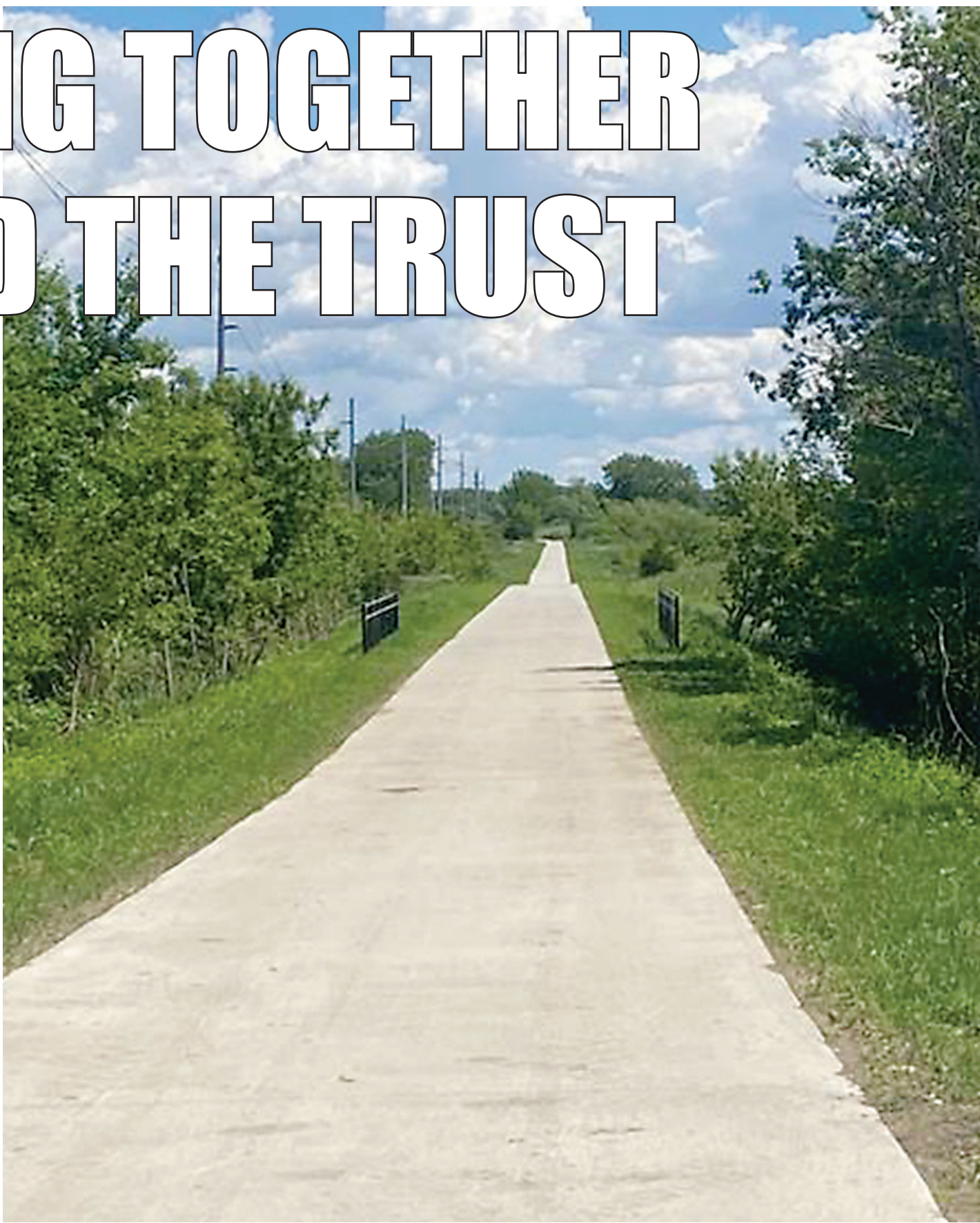




OUTDOOR CONNECTION

STORIES, ADVICE, AND INFORMATION FOR OUTDOOR LOVERS

WORKING TOGETHER TO FUND THE TRUST



This is just a sample of the type of trails that could be expanded if the Natural Resources and Outdoor Recreation Trust Fund were to become reality.

Photo submitted

Without income source, no way to improve Iowa's natural resources

By STEVE WEISMAN
OUTDOOR EDITOR

In November of 2010, the people of Iowa voted on the concept and "chose to amend Iowa's Constitution and create the Natural Resources and Outdoor Recreation Trust Fund and a dedicated funding source."

This passage activated Senate File 2310 (SF2310) into law on January 1, 2011, which provides the framework for the distribution, use, and accountability of the Natural Resources and Outdoor Recreation Trust Fund. Upon enactment, SF2310 was finalized into Iowa Code Chapter 461. The amendment passed by 63% of the voters.

When that occurred, I was so excited about what was to come. However, I soon found that there was one thing missing! SF2310 had not been funded. Now what is that all about? You go to that much effort and then not fund it? Many people, myself included, were totally shocked!

Unfortunately, the answer was no! Here's the kicker! The amendment states: No revenue shall be credited to the fund until the tax rate for the sales tax imposed upon the retail sales price of tangible personal property and the furnishing of enumerated services sold in this State in effect on the effective date of this section is increased. When the sales tax is increased, then the fund will be annually credited with an amount equal to the amount generated by a sales tax rate of three-eighths of one cent.

The original formula encompassed these areas:

- lake restoration
- increasing and improving trails
- adding to the Resource Enhancement and Protection (REAP) program
- local conservation programs
- watershed protection
- soil conservation and water protection
- improving natural resources.

What a way to not listen to the voters of Iowa! Each year since that time, proponents for the Natural Resources and Outdoor Recreation Trust Fund have approached the governor and Iowa's legislators to get this initiative funded. Each time it has failed. Again, I say this is not fair to all Iowans!

Of course, with the cutting of taxes in previous sessions, the thought of increasing sales tax is definitely frowned upon.

Turn to **TRUST**, Page 7B



Above left, Sabin Adams, Minnesota Public Lands Manager for Pheasants Forever presents Joe Ulman, SLPA board member, with Pheasants Forever award for PARTNERSHIP OF THE YEAR for 2023 given to the SLPA.

Photo courtesy Pheasants Forever

Spirit Lake Protective Association receives major conservation award

By STEVE WEISMAN
OUTDOOR EDITOR

The Spirit Lake Protective Association (SLPA) received a major award at the Minnesota State Chapter Leadership Convention held in Willmar, MN on January 19-20.

The award is the Minnesota Pheasants Forever (PF) "Partnership of the Year for 2023" given to the SPLA for its efforts in working with conservationists, clean water groups in both Minnesota and Iowa, along with national conservation organizations to secure a 195.5 acre parcel of farmland just north of Shore Acres on the north shore of Big Spirit

Lake. This land will now provide a much-needed wildlife area and an important buffer to protect Big Spirit Lake waters. The land has been named the Howard K. Vincent Waterfowl Production Area Site in honor of Howard K. Vincent, the former longtime CEO of the national Pheasants Forever organization.

Sabin Adams, Minnesota Public Lands Manager for PF presented the award to Joe Ulman, board member for the SLPA. Adams reflected on the award. "Having the Spirit Lake Protective Association come to the table as a partner in this

Turn to **AWARD**, Page 7B

Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation secures 132 acres on east side of Big Spirit Lake

By STEVE WEISMAN
OUTDOOR EDITOR

The Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation (INHF) recently completed the purchase of 132 acres on the east side of Big Spirit Lake (to the east side of 270th Avenue) from the Gruhn family. The property will eventually be sold and transferred to the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and opened to the public.

"The purchase of this property will allow for additional wetland restoration on the existing public wildlife area. The property is in an identified Prairie Pothole Joint Venture Priority Area. Many migratory bird species will benefit from the restoration of this project."

Joe Jayjack

INHF COMMUNICATION DIRECTOR

Situated in the Big Spirit watershed, close to Big Spirit Lake, land use on the property has a direct impact on water quality to and in the lake. Future restoration will prevent soil disturbance and enhance its ability to absorb high volume rain events. This will in-turn help with filtration into groundwater. Currently the entire slough is in private ownership. Acquisition will also protect remnant prairie and a portion of the Sandbar Slough shoreline and access.

The aerial map gives a visual

of the location of the secured land marked off in yellow. As noted on the map, the Gruhn farmstead will remain under family ownership, and the acquired property will extend north of the farmstead to the gravel road and then west to a parcel of land which was acquired in 1997 (Pottoff property), also called the Hales Slough WMA. That 160-acre project now in DNR ownership is part of the 274-acre Hales Slough property located across 270th Avenue.

As shown on the aerial map, the Gruhn purchase then heads west to the northeast shoreline of Sandbar Slough (Sandbar Slough is the white/purple area on the map) and then back across to the north along the backside of the farmstead.

According to Joe Jayjack, Communications Director for the INHF, "The purchase of this property will allow for additional wetland restoration on the existing public wildlife area. The property is in an identified Prairie Pothole Joint Venture Priority Area. Many migratory bird species will benefit from the restoration of this project."

According to John Smeltzer, president of the Spirit Lake Protective Association, "The Spirit Lake Protective Association is delighted to hear about the acquisition of the Gruhn Farm by the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation. This action fits perfectly into the mission of SLPA: 'Quality of Water, Quality of Life'. Congratulations to the Gruhn family and INHF for their lasting commitment to the wellbeing of the entire Iowa Great Lakes Area."

Jayjack added that the INHF will likely be raising funds for future native habitat restoration on the property.



Aerial view of the recent purchase of 132 acres from the Gruhn family, highlighted in yellow.

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Outdoor Connection



Last year's tournament featured 184 anglers.

Photo submitted

FIFTH ANNUAL CAMP AUTUMN ICE FISHING TOURNAMENT SET FOR FEB. 10

By **STEVE WEISMAN**
Outdoor Editor

The fifth annual Camp Autumn Ice Fishing Tournament & Fundraiser is just around the corner with the event taking place at Camp Autumn's 30-acre private lake on Saturday, February 10 with registration between 9 a.m. to 10 a.m. with the tournament running from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Lunch and awarding of prizes will take place following the tournament.

Hosted by Seasons Center for Behavioral Health and Camp Autumn, this free event is open to the public. Registration is encouraged but not required. Free will donations will be accepted. All money raised goes towards scholarships for children to attend Camp Autumn, a therapeutic day camp for children in northwest Iowa. Camp Autumn is located at 4233 Yew Ave. in Sutherland, Iowa.

In 2023, a total of 184 people joined in on the fun day of fishing, and through the generosity of Camp Autumn sponsors and

the donations of fishing participants, a total of \$15,022 was raised for the Camp Autumn scholarship fund.

Once again, the Iowa Great Lakes Fishing Club (IGLFC) will be offering its assistance throughout the day with IGLFC volunteers helping anglers access the lake, providing ice fishing shelters, equipment and tackle for individuals or families who do not have fishing equipment. According to IGLFC president, Terry Thomsen, "The club thoroughly enjoys helping with the Camp Autumn Ice Fishing Tournament. Our goal is to make sure that everybody has a great time on the ice. As we have in the past, the IGLFC will be giving away a free ice fishing rod/reel combo to the first 60 youngsters age 15 and under. We appreciate the Fisherman's Factory Outlet store for helping with the combos and lines and also to Bev Shuck, who donated Jigger Minnow spoons to put on the combos."

Stephanie Pohar, VP of Marketing and Fund Development at Seasons Center,

says, "Whether you love ice fishing or have never tried it, this event is for you. We will have lots of volunteers to help those trying the sport for the first time. We will also have special challenge holes with additional prize opportunities."

Catch and Release

IGLC volunteers will coordinate the tournament itself. It is a catch and release tournament with prizes for the top places in each category...how do you keep track?

Each angler is given an orange flag on a wire. When a fish is caught, a flag is raised, and a member of the Iowa Great Lakes Fishing Club (wearing yellow reflector vests) will go over and measure the length of the fish. Then the angler will take out an official piece of paper with types of fish typed on the paper and a spot to put the length of each individual fish measured. That is then initialed by the club member. At the end of the contest, participants will add up the total length of their five best

fish in each category, and the results are used to determine placings.

Prize categories will be based on length for bass, crappie, and bluegill/other panfish with prizes awarded to the top three placers in each category.

A special prize will go to the youngster catching the single largest fish. The winner will receive a fully guided ½ day fishing trip with area guide Darrin Jones, owner of Big Fin Guide Service. Jones notes, "For me, fishing and fun go together extremely well. This guided fishing trip is an experience that I love to share with people, especially kids! There isn't anything better than seeing their reaction to catching fish. It's a great opportunity for my family to support this! I believe in their mission. Camp Autumn helps kids, giving them a safe space that nurtures hope, healing and fun."

Keeping warm and full

Yes, there's something for everyone!

Mud on Main Coffee House & Roastery, from Cherokee, will be providing coffee and hot cocoa for the tournament. A chili lunch is being provided by Spencer Hy-Vee. At the same time, Iowa State University Extension and Outreach will have an indoor art activity for those that need to warm up inside.

Pohar adds, "We are excited to host the Fifth Annual Ice Fishing Tournament and Fundraiser at Camp Autumn. We are thrilled to open up our private lake and give people from area communities an opportunity to fish while supporting a great cause. There is a lot of work that goes into an event like this, and we couldn't do it without the help and support of our sponsors. We are especially grateful to the Iowa Great Lakes Fishing Club for their continued generosity and support of our camp and the youth that we serve."

Sponsors include the following: City View Farms, Community State Bank, Valero Renewables, Oak Hill Outdoor,

No Limits Outdoor, Northwest Bank, Northwest Wealth Management, Snook's of Okoboji, Vander Haag's, Boji Custom Metal Works, Shucks Lures, Johnston Automotive and Keong Portable Toilets. New sponsors include De Kam Salvage and T & S Construction, both from Doon, IA.

For more information, or to register, visit <https://rb.gy/b8spc3>. If necessary, updates regarding weather will be posted on Seasons Center's website (Events page) and Facebook page.

For those who can't attend the event, but would like to donate to Camp Autumn, please visit <https://seasonscenter.org/donate.php> or you can donate via Venmo @SeasonsIowa. In the comments section, please note the donation is for the Ice Fishing Tournament.

2023 hunting, fishing, trapping license sales

In 2023, Iowa residents purchased...

Fishing

199,031 annual licenses
8,773 lifetime fishing licenses
17,428 three-year licenses
1,022 seven-day licenses
2,998 one-day licenses
44,278 trout fees
232 paddlefish licenses
20,619 third line licenses (resident and non-resident combined)
36,327 fishing, hunting and habitat combination licenses

Hunting

39,602 annual licenses
55,553 hunting and habitat annual combination licenses
3,610 lifetime hunting licenses
7,510 hunting and habitat three-year licenses
1,210 apprentice (hunting and habitat) licenses
24,714 migratory game bird licenses
39,893 habitat fees
14,474 furharvester annual licenses age 16 and older
495 furharvester annual licenses age 15 and younger
469 furharvester and habitat annual combination licenses
358 lifetime furharvester licenses

Large Game - Deer

12,551 youth general deer, 1,050 antlerless deer licenses
267 disabled hunter general deer, 31 antlerless deer licenses
54,285 archery general deer, 21,632 antlerless deer licenses
6,796 early muzzleloader general deer, 1,463 antlerless deer licenses

44,492 first shotgun general deer, 17,278 antlerless deer licenses
47,420 second shotgun general deer, 18,514 antlerless deer licenses
19,642 late muzzleloader general deer, 9,651 antlerless deer licenses

Turkey

5,248 spring bow licenses
16,673 spring gun/bow licenses seasons 1-3
18,807 spring gun/bow licenses season 4
46,175 spring youth gun/bow licenses
2,356 fall gun/bow
1,821 fall bow
Landowner-Tenant

Deer

66 youth general deer licenses, 55 antlerless deer licenses
5,202 archery general deer licenses, 5,558 antlerless deer licenses
979 early muzzleloader general deer licenses, 867 antlerless deer licenses
22,653 first and second shotgun season general deer licenses, 19,016 antlerless deer licenses
2,254 late muzzleloader general deer licenses, 3,539 antlerless deer licenses

Turkey

2,067 spring gun/bow season 1-3
2,366 spring gun/bow season 4
815 bow licenses
2,526 fall gun/bow
1,009 fall bow

In 2023, nonresidents purchased...

Fishing

27,264 annual licenses
2,673 seven-day licenses
11,813 three-day licenses
14,951 one-day licenses
7,868 trout fees

44 paddlefish licenses

Hunting

5,440 annual licenses age 18 and older
16,346 hunting and habitat annual combination licenses age 18 and older
4,737 five-day licenses
2,204 five-day hunting and habitat combination
12,672 habitat fees
4,069 migratory game bird fees
745 apprentice (hunting and habitat) licenses
119 furharvester annual licenses
47 furharvester and habitat annual combination licenses



LURE ACTION UNDER ICE

By Bob Jensen
FISHING THE MIDWEST FISHING TEAM

So far this ice fishing season, I've been thinking more about ice fishing than actually doing it. Hopefully that will change soon. Looking through my ice fishing equipment reminds of some of the things that I've discovered about catching fish through the ice. The action that we put on a lure can play a big role in our catching success.

At times lots of action and noise can attract a fish to our bait. When this is the case, a technique called "pounding" can be the ticket. "Pounding" is accomplished when an angler uses a heavier lure, usually a spoon but sometimes a jig, and aggressively bounces it off the bottom. When the spoon hits the bottom it makes noise as it bounces off rocks, or it creates a "dust cloud" when it lands on a softer bottom. Either way, it gets a nearby fish's attention.

Pounding is often productive in stained water or around rocks. A fish might be on one side of a large rock while your bait is on the other side of the rock. By bouncing your bait off the rock, it gets the fish's attention. A spoon with rattles, something like a Rattlin' P.T. Spoon, is often better. The rattles along with the pounding is going to get a fish's attention. Pounding works well for walleyes or perch.

Sometimes the fish want a bait that's almost motionless. I learned that a few February's ago on an ice fishing trip to South Dakota. A severe cold front with cloudless blue skies had blown in. The fast fishing of yesterday was replaced with terribly slow fishing the next day. Sonar revealed that perch would come in and look at our tiny baits, then swim slowly away. We tried different colors, different sizes, and a variety of actions.

Finally, in frustration, when the next perch came in to investigate my bait as I sat in the portable shelter, I rested my elbow of the arm that I was jigging with on my knee and held the bait as motionless as possible. After several seconds of observation, the perch gently sucked in my jig. Several others followed. In recent years, successful ice anglers have been tipping their jigs with Maki plastic baits. These baits are very soft and wiggle just the right way when the fish, mostly panfish, want a bait with minimal action.

Last thing. In years past, anglers have often preferred bigger hooks on their baits. The thought is that bigger hooks mean better hooking percentages. In the summer when we're moving our baits faster, bigger hooks are a good idea.



Sometimes a tiny, motionless jig is what the perch want.

Photo by Bob Jensen

But in some situations smaller hooks can be a very good idea. In the summer when live bait is being used, a smaller hook enables the live bait to move more freely and be more appealing to fish.

In the winter, smaller treble hooks on spoons and some other baits have been producing better catches than similar baits with bigger trebles. The Tikka Flash employs a much smaller than ordinary treble,

and hooking percentages are up significantly. It's easier for a fish to inhale the bait since the hook is smaller.

Those of us who like to fish are fortunate to have access to lots of fishing information.

We need to be open to new ideas that might conflict with our usual way of doing things when we go fishing. When we start doing that, we'll start catching even more fish.



On behalf of SLPA's Board of Directors, Joe Ulman, SLPA board member, presents a symbolic check for \$250,000 from SLPA membership and friends (including \$100,000 from Dickinson County Water Quality Commission) to Marilyn Vetter, President and CEO of the National Pheasants Forever organization.

Photo courtesy Pheasants Forever

AWARD, Continued from Page 5B

acquisition was a major win for Pheasants Forever, public lands and water quality. Doing these kinds of projects alone would be nearly impossible and therefore finding great partners is essential. Anytime you can have a partner like SLPA, who can bring local, as well as financial support to a project, you can do incredible things. The Howard K. Vincent acquisition could not have been done without them. We look forward to partnering with them on the next one!"

According to Ulman, "The SLPA is honored to be given this award. It is amazing how so many groups, organizations and individuals came together to make this project happen. We thank the Minnesota

Pheasants Forever for recognizing our efforts."

John Smeltzer, president of the SLPA, reflects on the significance of this project and the importance of organizations working together. "The importance of the collaboration and patience required to make a project like this come together should not be underestimated. The SLPA is but a small partner in this entire effort. We have a passion for protecting our waters, and we appreciate the investment we are all making in this area. This is truly a legacy project."

That same evening, Ulman presented a symbolic check to PF CEO and President Marilyn Vetter for \$250,000 from SLPA Membership and

friends (including \$100,000 from Dickinson County Water Quality Commission) on behalf of SLPA and its membership for its efforts in helping make the "Spirit Lake North" project, now the Howard K. Vincent Waterfowl Production Area, a reality.

Smeltzer concluded, "The motto for the SLPA is 'Quality of Water - Quality of Life,' and this project puts those words in action. SLPA thanks everyone who played a role in making this all come together. It was over a decade in the making and hundreds of supporters, including the Dickinson County Water Quality Commission were big parts of the puzzle."

TRUST, Continued from Page 5B

Legislators for the last couple of sessions have talked about a tax-neutral deal that would be able to fund the Trust Fund. One year COVID got in the way, so they say! What I have heard from some legislators is that they need to hear from the voters in their area! So, I say let's do that! Let's reach out again and again. We need to make it a hot burner issue and not give up!

Bottom Line

Keep up the fight! The Trust Fund still is a WIN-WIN for all of Iowa. It will provide reliable funding for clean water and watershed protection, conservation practices, and wildlife habitat, which will grow as the economy grows. At the same time, the funded projects will increase the potential of more people, including out-of-state visitors, to take the opportunity to experience the increased quality of our natural resources.

In addition, this use can potentially lead to increased job opportunities and help fuel Iowa's economy even more! We know how important that is to our rural economy. By protecting and

increasing our natural resources, we have a better chance of attracting more people to Iowa who want to experience the quality of life that exists here. Bottom line that means more revenue!

Yes, I feel strongly about this. I want Iowa to be a state with natural resources of which we will all be proud. It must be our legacy for the future...to conserve clean water, protect our agricultural soils and increase the opportunity to fish, hunt, hike, bird watch and just plain enjoy nature! Join me in making this happen!

So, now what?

We need to be the squeaky wheel that just won't go away and shut up...not until we get what we asked for back in 2010! Work as individuals, contact our legislators, work with groups like the Iowa's Water and Land Legacy, the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation, Pheasants Forever and Ducks Unlimited and other conservation organizations. Don't take "no" for an answer, but if WE don't speak up, then it most certainly will not happen! After all, this is OUR state!

Snowmobilers welcome snow and the return of winter

DES MOINES - Snowmobilers across Iowa welcomed the return of winter, eager to get out and enjoy the fresh snow. Snowmobiling is a great way to enjoy the outdoors during the winter months, but there's one hard truth: drinking alcohol and/or consuming drugs and riding just don't mix.

"It's important to remember that operating any type of motor vehicle, including snowmobiles, while under the influence of alcohol or drugs can cause traumatic injuries, tragic loss of life, and is flat-out against the law," said Captain Matt Bruner with the Iowa DNR's Law Enforcement Bureau. "We recommend snowmobile riders of all ages take a snowmobile safety course, don't outride your abilities or trail conditions, and perhaps most importantly, don't drink and ride."

The following safety tips will make snowmobiling a great experience with all recreation explorers:

Don't drive impaired: Alcohol and drugs have a negative effect on the driver's vision, balance, coordination, and reaction time. Don't ride with people who drink and ride!

Stay on the trail or stay home: Trespassing is a major complaint about snowmobilers

and can result in trail closure. Always stay on designated snowmobile trails. Venturing off trails can result in accidents. Only ride private property when you have landowner permission.

Watch the weather and check trail and ice conditions before riding: Don't ride in adverse weather conditions. Plan your trip and check the trails you'll be riding prior to departure.

Never ride alone: Always ride with a friend on another snowmobile. This way if one machine is disabled, you have another to get help.

Dress for safety and survival: Always wear a quality DOT helmet and facemask. Wear layers of clothing to keep warm and dry. Snowmobile suits, bibs, jackets, gloves, and mittens should cut the wind, repel water, and keep you ventilated.

Slow down: Excessive speed is a major factor in many accidents, especially at night. To help avoid accidents, keep your nighttime speed under 40 MPH.

Take a snowmobile safety training course: Designed to educate the student on basic snowmobile operation, laws and regulations, and safety, these classes can help save lives and reduce injuries.



While snow storms during the first couple weeks of January allowed area snowmobilers to get out on the trails, the Emmet County snow trail groomer has seen limited action due to the recent warm spell.

File photo

DNR sets public meetings to recap hunting, trapping seasons and to discuss possible rule changes

DES MOINES — The Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is hosting a series of town hall-style meetings in 18 different sites where local staff will provide updates on recently completed hunting and trapping seasons, discuss possible changes to hunting and trapping rules and regulations, and address other topics as requested.

"We want people to come out to these meetings, listen to the seasons reviews, ask questions and hear directly from our staff," said Todd Bishop, chief of the Iowa DNR's Wildlife Bureau. "Part of the meeting will be devoted to discussing potential rule changes and collecting feedback as we work through the rules process."

The meetings are open to the public. Comments collected from these public meetings will be considered along with other related comments received by the Iowa DNR prior to proposing changes to hunting rules and regulations. Proposed rules will be presented to the Natural Resource Commission during a regular public meeting for consideration and additional public comment.

Any person attending the public meeting that has special requirements, such as those related to mobility or hearing impairments, should contact the Iowa 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.

Meeting date, time and locations in northwest Iowa:

- Algona, Feb. 20, 7 p.m., Waters Edge Nature Center, 1010 250th Street
- Okoboji, Feb. 20, 6:30 p.m., Maser Monarch Lodge, 22785 Nature Center Road
- Lake View, Feb. 21, 6:30 p.m., Speaker Park Shelter House, 418 North Blossom Street

Outdoor Connection

Pine Grosbeak Female

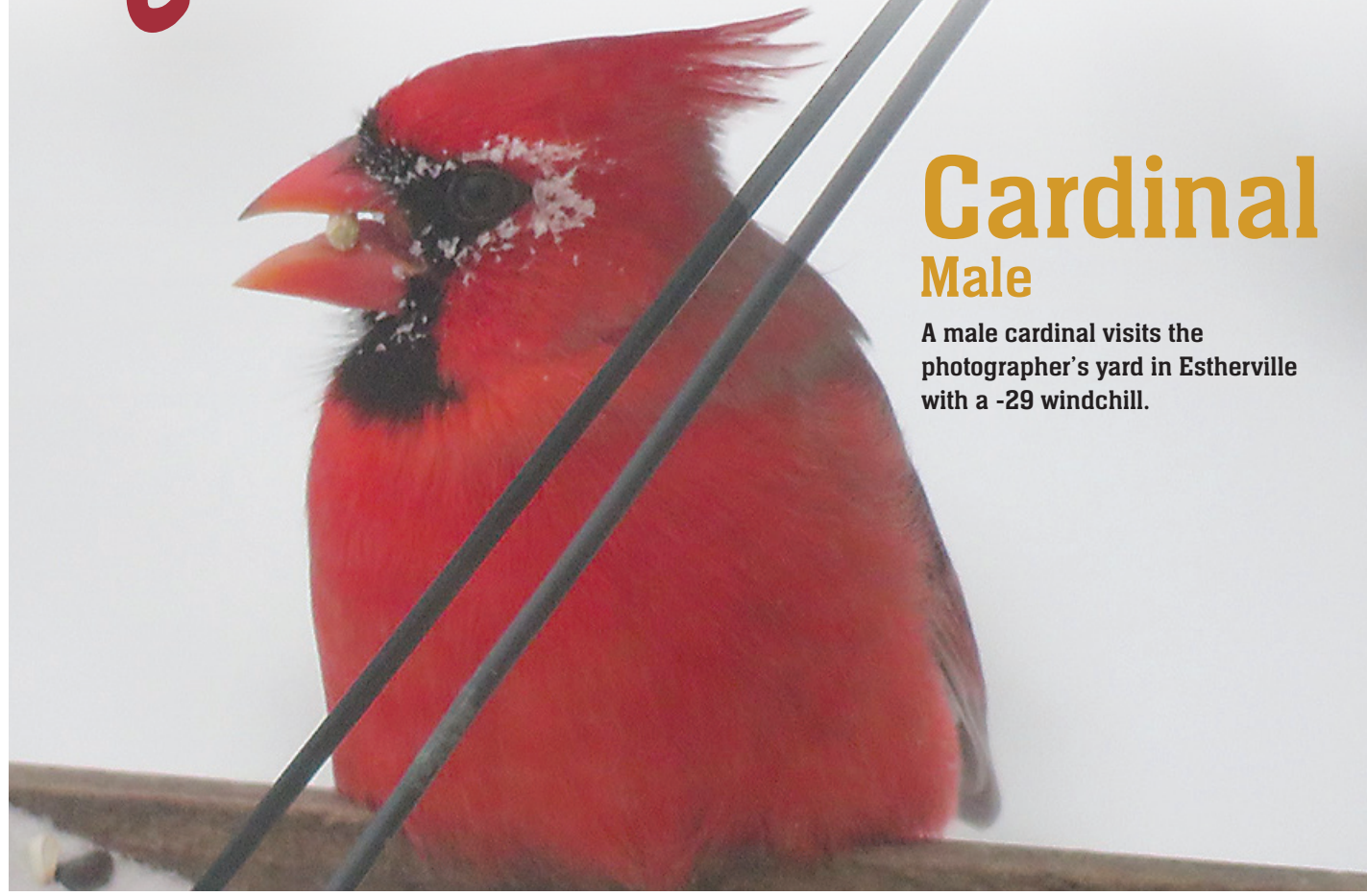
A rare visitor from northern Minnesota was viewed on Hill Avenue in Spirit Lake. It was reported in early December and still seen in the area several weeks ago.



Red Beauties

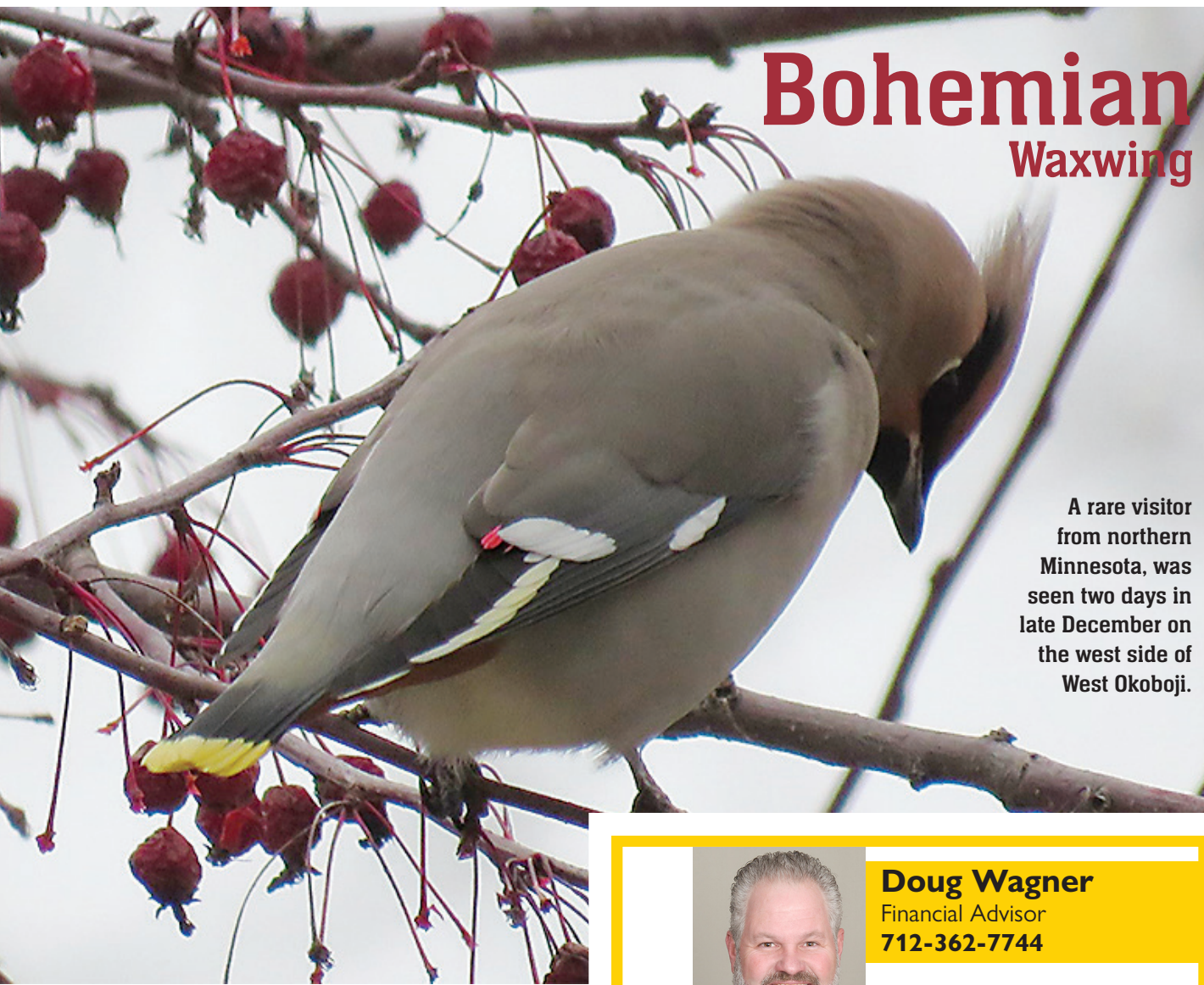
Cardinal Male

A male cardinal visits the photographer's yard in Estherville with a -29 windchill.



Bohemian Waxwing

A rare visitor from northern Minnesota, was seen two days in late December on the west side of West Okoboji.



Pine Grosbeak Female

Female Pine grosbeak eats some crab apples in Spirit Lake.



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Cardinal Female

A female cardinal visits the photographer's yard in Estherville with a -29 windchill.



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