



OUTDOOR CONNECTION

STORIES, ADVICE, AND INFORMATION FOR OUTDOOR LOVERS

ENJOYING THE LAST FRONTIER



The prominent Hubbard glacier in Glacier Bay National Park.

Photo by Steve Weisman

Author crosses Alaska cruise off bucket list

By STEVE WEISMAN
OUTDOOR EDITOR

My wife and I recently returned from our 9-day cruise to Alaska. Yes, we were exhausted, but we definitely checked a big trip off our bucket list. Here are some thoughts about our cruise.

Having never been on a cruise before, needless to say, my wife and I were a little worried. So, to adjust for any potential issues, we built in a day's stay in Seattle prior to leaving on the cruise and an extra day's stay in Seattle after we returned.

Things went smoothly on both ends and getting on the Norwegian Sun was pretty much effortless. The day we were to board the ship, the shuttle driver delivered us right in front of the Norwegian Sun, and within 30 minutes



This 8-pound silver salmon was one of two fish caught during salmon outing.

Photo by Steve Weisman



This humpback whale shows its tail (fluking) to help it begin a deep dive.

Photo by Steve Weisman

we were through security and onboard. By noon, we were in the midst of meeting other travelers and scoping out the 12 levels of the Sun. Not as big as many other cruise ships, the Sun holds over 1900 visitors at capacity, along with 906 crew members. The amenities included 14 dining areas, 12 bar & lounges, several opportunities for entertainment, a casino, a spa, jogging track, sports courts, a fitness center. Internet station, athletic courts, two swimming pools, a kid's pool and several hot tubs.

At 848 feet in length, there were several elevators, but we had to learn which ones went where. Yes, we did get mixed up from time to time on which elevator would get us to our balcony room on the 9th floor. We felt comfortable with the atmosphere on the Norwegian Sun, the courtesy and helpfulness of the crew. Whenever we

were hungry, whenever we wanted some quality entertainment, whenever we wanted to head back to our room and just enjoy the peacefulness of our tiny – but private state room – to watch the beauty of Alaska and the sea.

Day 1 & 2

These were our at-sea days that took us from Seattle to our first stop: Sitka. During this time, we explored the Sun, and we had the chance to learn from the crew what was going to happen once we hit Sitka. We had a refresher on the history of Alaska and that at one time, Russia controlled the territory for its abundance of prime animal pelts. The fur trade business was huge. However, it was too much for Russia to handle, so in 1867 the United States purchased it for \$7,200,000 or approximately \$.02 per acre! Still, while many Americans believed this was a good

move, there were also Americans figured this was foolish, and the purchase was called "Seward's Folly" after the Secretary of State William H. Seward. Over the next 257 years, Americans have visited Alaska and learned of its rugged beauty and the importance of Alaska to the country itself! Alaska became a state in 1959, and since that time, tourists from all over the world have visited and continue to visit the state known as the Last Frontier.

Our Cruise – Exploring 7 different ports

My wife and I felt the best way to experience the majesty and rugged beauty of Alaska was to do so through a cruise. Our ports included Sitka, Juneau, Skagway, Cruising Glacier Bay, Icy Strait Point, Ketchikan (Warren Cove) and Victoria British

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West Swan renovation update

Wet weather delayed project

By STEVE WEISMAN
OUTDOOR EDITOR

On a recent interview with Mike Hawkins, fisheries biologist with the Iowa DNR, he and I discussed the ongoing renovation project taking place at West Swan Lake located southeast of Gruver. The project began in the fall of 2022 with the goal for the renovation to be complete and ready for restocking this past spring, but Mother Nature didn't cooperate.

Hawkins explained that the weather over the past two years delayed the effort to rid West Swan Lake in Emmet County of rough fish including bullhead and common carp. "Both of those winters we tried to draw the lake down to get it to winter kill."

According to Hawkins, last winter, after the drawdown, the DNR tried to finish the project with a chemical treatment to



From this wooden bridge on the northeast side of West Swan Lake, this was the view before the lake restoration project began.

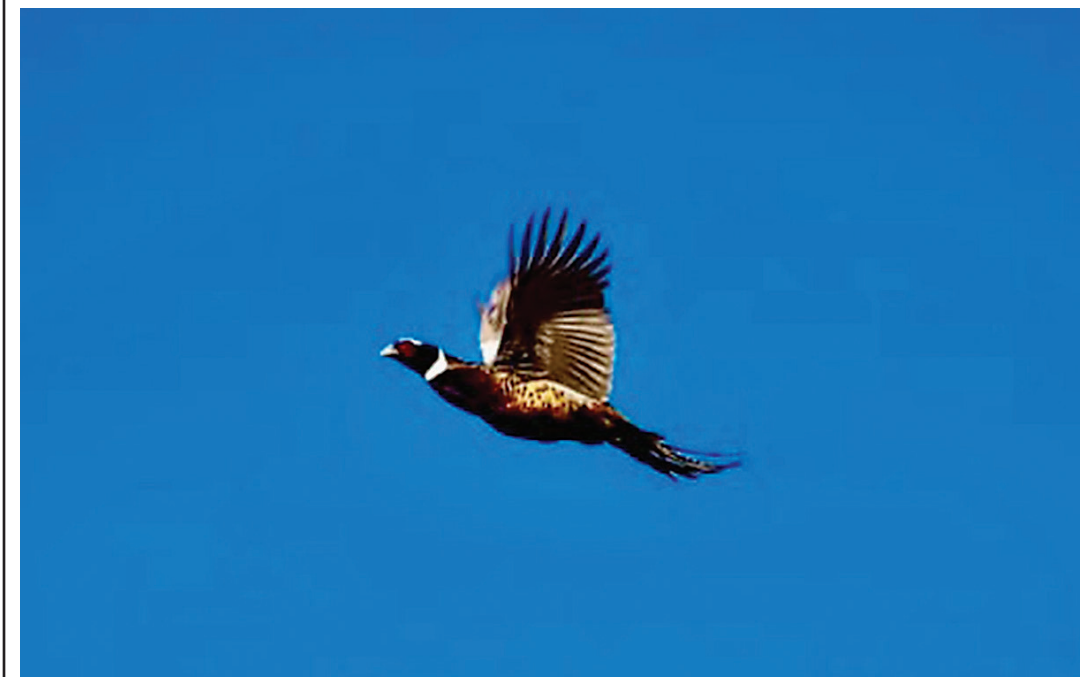
Photo by David Swartz

get rid of the rest of the rough fish.

"Unfortunately, we were not successful. We had the warmest winter on record last winter, and we had a very short window for pulling that project off." As the ice was going off in the spring, there were concerns that carp had been seen, so the Iowa Great Lakes Conservation Club assisted

the Iowa DNR by conducting several drone flights to identify the results where live carp had been seen in groups near the edges of open water. Unfortunately, the drone pictures confirmed that there were still carp in the lake. Then the late June flooding came that actually brought water levels

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A rooster takes flight on a bright sunny fall day.

Photo by David Swartz

A look at the upcoming pheasant season

Numbers down due to wet weather earlier this year

By STEVE WEISMAN
OUTDOOR EDITOR

Habitat and weather are the two factors often tied to the pheasant population numbers. Each year the Iowa DNR's August Roadside Count data reflects those two variables. Since 1962, the Iowa DNR has conducted the August Roadside Survey, generating data from approximately 225/30-mile routes on Iowa's upland game: ring-necked pheasants, bobwhite quail, gray partridge, cottontail rabbits, and white-tailed jackrabbits.

The most reliable and best counts are compiled on cool mornings when the sun is shining with heavy dew and no wind. Let's take a look at what the roadside count data shows for 2024.

Statewide, results show Iowa's pheasant population to be 19 birds per 30-mile

route, which is down from the 23 birds per route a year ago. After a relatively mild winter with below average snowfall, the pheasant population seemed to be heading toward another bird increase in 2024. Unfortunately, that changed with the intense flooding that occurred during the nesting season. There is little doubt that the drop in overall numbers coincide with the heavy rainfall that occurred during late June.

Based on the results of the August roadside survey, Iowa hunters can still expect to harvest 350,000 to 400,000 roosters. Last year, Iowa saw an increase of an estimated 20,000 pheasant hunters over 2022, which helped push the harvest to nearly 600,000.

Todd Bogenschutz, upland wildlife research biologist with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources shared his thoughts on the successes of recent years. "Iowa hunters have enjoyed good pheasant hunting over most of the state for the

past five seasons, including last year, when we had the highest harvest in 16 years. If our dry weather continues into fall, the corn and soybean harvest could be mostly complete by opening day, and that usually leads to good success."

Bogenschutz still thinks the 2024 season will be a good one. "Last year, pheasant hunting was the best it's been since 2007, and while the numbers from the survey were lower, it's shaping up for another good fall," he said.

Let's take a look at each region. The NW region averaged 33 birds per route which was the highest density of any region in 2024, while the NE and NC regions averaged 25 and 24 birds/route respectively. All three regions should offer good to excellent pheasant hunting, particularly around public and private lands with good winter habitat.

The WC region reported the second highest counts in the

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Low Key Tuttle Lake Wildlife Area Offers a Little Bit of Everything

Editor's note: The most recent addition to Tuttle Lake was converted to prairie and the planting is doing well. Mountain mint, gray headed coneflower, hoary vervain, partridge pea, great blue lobelia, goldenrod, showy tic trefoil, Maximilien sunflower, compass plant, purple prairie clover, side oats gramma, false boneset, prairie onion, prairie blazing star, June grass leadplant can all be seen.

farm so much of the area historically, was kept as pasture.

"We think there's some remnant prairie there, and we're managing it to see what will return," Straw said.

Part of that management includes using prescribed fire to mimic what had occurred naturally. Prairie Lakes staff burned a quarter section this spring to rejuvenate the prairie plants and keep the woody vegetation from encroaching.

The most recent acquisition was northeast of the intersection of 510th Avenue and 120th Street and a portion of that was converted to prairie. The young planting is really showing itself.

Mountain mint, gray headed coneflower, hoary vervain, partridge pea, great blue lobelia, goldenrod, showy tic trefoil, Maximilien sunflower, compass plant, purple prairie clover, side oats gramma, false boneset, prairie onion, prairie blazing star, June grass leadplant and more. The prairie is buzzing with insects and grassland birds.

A neighbor, who is part of the beginning farmer program, assists with some of the work.

He has handled the haying, and planting and maintaining the food plots for the past four years.

The largest feature of the area is Tuttle Lake at 2,300 acres. The shallow natural lake is on the state line with roughly 970 acres in Iowa.

While it is a larger lake by

Iowa standards, it is shallow with a maximum depth of around six feet. Its 50,000-acre watershed feeding the lake helps to minimize fish kills even during severe winters.

Natural resources agencies in Iowa and Minnesota coordinate fish sampling and the Iowa DNR stocks the lake with newly hatched walleye fry. Residents of both states can fish the lake with a resident fishing license.

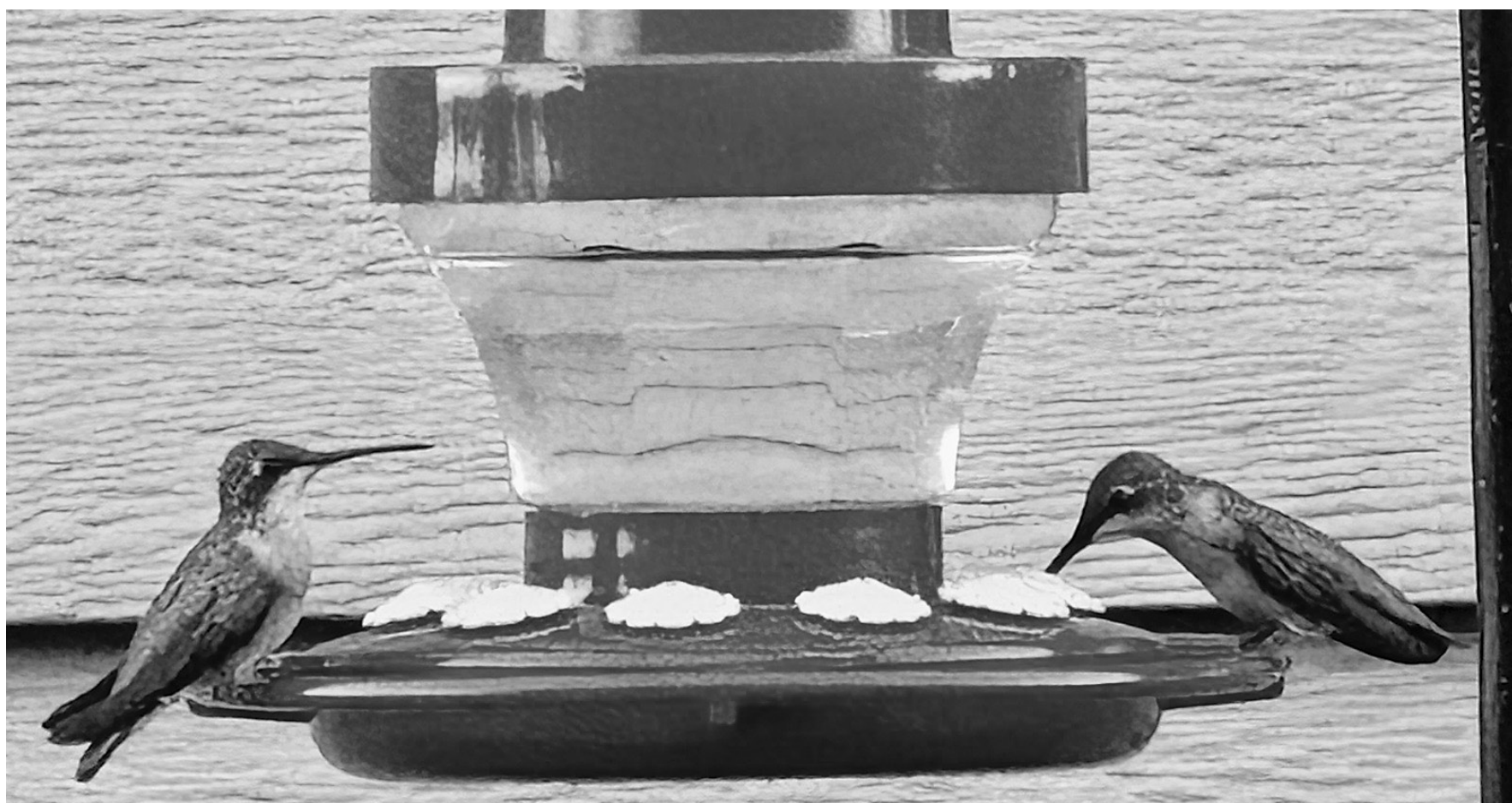
"The outlet is a popular wader fishing spot for walleyes in the spring," he said.

The fry stocking has provided a more consistent product here, and walleye fishing has been good recently, but can have ups and downs because of winter kills and limited habitat.

The lake has a good population of channel catfish and bullheads, with crappies, yellow perch and a few northern pike available. The outlet is the headwaters for the East Fork of the Des Moines River.

The outlet is on the southeast corner of the lake and on the edge of Okamanpedan State Park, a small day-use only state park with no modern facilities. Emmet County has a park on the southwest corner of the lake, with electrical campsites, restroom, a boat ramp and playground.

A state managed boat ramp and parking lot sits between the two parks. The ramp and parking lot are scheduled for improvements next year.



A pair of hummingbirds stop in for a little nectar. Most have migrated with just a few hummers still around.

Photo by Steve Weisman

How things have changed

By STEVE WEISMAN
OUTDOOR EDITOR

Who would ever have thought after the flooding that occurred in Iowa in late June that by the third week of September, we would be talking drought conditions in Iowa? Well, that's where we are at! According to the National Integrated Drought Information System (NIDIS), the entire state of Iowa is currently at the first level of drought, abnormally dry. The map released on Thursday, September 19. One area in northeast and the far southwest are noted as being in a moderate drought situation.

Of course, there have been some rains across the central and eastern parts of the state last week that might have changed this drought report.

I guess my thought is this...there seems to be no normal weather anymore. Across the entire United States, our weather is one of extremes. From flooding to drought to tornadoes to hurricanes and intense wildfires, we simply can't seem to get a break!

Our area lakes are showing the result of these dry conditions. Here is a look at the Iowa Great Lakes. The high-water crest on Big Spirit occurred on June 25 at 16.51 feet. Right now, Big Spirit is 2.58 feet below that level. The spillway is no longer flowing and is .22 feet below crest!

As for the Okobojis, the high-water mark on June 25

was 8.12 feet. Right now, the Okobojis are currently 4.14 feet below that level and .06 feet below the Lower Gar overflow.

Holy cow! What a shame!

My dad, who farmed all his life, had this saying about the weather...all you can do about the weather is talk about it! We must do the best that we can with what we get and do our best to help our environment and protect our natural resources!

Fall is here

Sunday, September 22 was officially the first day of fall. We went from the 80s of last week to upper 60s on Sunday. The extended forecasts show highs now in the 70s. So, it looks like there will be no chances of frost for a while, but there is not much chance for rain.

As an outdoorsman, however, this is an awesome time of the year. We have so many hunting openers and seasons, the rest of the open water season. Think of those mild fall days with very little wind and chasing perch on Big Spirit or bluegills and crappies on the Okobojis! Then, of course, there will be the late fall wader fishing. However, that's not for me anymore with my balance not nearly what it once was. That doesn't mean, however, that I can't enjoy seeing the pictures on Facebook and hearing the stories of my younger friends that enjoy wader fishing.

Check the colors and the migration

It's subtle right now, but those colors are beginning to appear! On your way to work or when you run to the store or pick up the kids after school, watch the changes in colors. Morning and evening walks become so incredibly inspiring! Add to it the magnificent sunrises and sunsets. Talk about breathtaking!

Don't forget to watch as the migrations continue. Last Saturday, as I was in my layout blind, I was watching the movement of the birds, when suddenly about 50 yards up, there was a beautiful monarch butterfly flitting along with the wind.

In the late afternoon, my wife and I will sit on the patio and look up! Talk about another world...the world of birds with so many of the migrating. Although, most are gone, we still get a few hummingbirds coming to our feeders and flowers for nectar.

At first, there is nothing, and then a buzzing occurs, and we will look up and there will be a hummer hovering right above our heads before they flit away!

Our pond behind our house is becoming more and more a refuge (no hunting allowed) as the Canada geese and ducks realize this pond is their pond. Add in a noisy, squawky heron and a pair of trumpeter swans...Oh for the noise! My wife and I call it our happy noise!

Iowa DNR News...

Migratory bird hunters reminded to register for Harvest Information program

DES MOINES — All hunters who pursue migratory game birds are required to register for Harvest Information Program (HIP) either through the Go Outdoors Iowa app on their smartphone, through a link at www.iowadnr.gov/waterfowl or atwww.gooutdoorsiowa.com.

Migratory game birds mean more than ducks and geese; in Iowa it includes mourning doves, ducks, geese, coots, doves, woodcock, rails, and snipe.

Once registered, hunters will need to write a confirmation number on their license, print an updated copy of their license with the confirmation or take a screenshot of their confirmation on their phone to show proof of registration.

Requiring a confirmation number will allow the DNR to better track migratory bird hunters — a federal requirement.

Cool nights, big savings when you camp in Iowa

DES MOINES — Fall is a gorgeous time to stay in an Iowa state park or forest. Now you can enjoy the beauty and tranquility of fall camping with this great deal!

Reserve a campsite in an Iowa state park* or forest and get a night free! Make your reservation today; some restrictions apply.

Enter promo code Autumn24 during checkout.

This offer is for online reservations only and is not available at Lake Manawa, Ledges, Maquoketa Caves or Walnut Woods state parks. The promo code can be used for campsite reservations now - October 31, 2024; not available for cabins or youth group sites.

Start planning your autumn adventures

DES MOINES — Autumn brings a welcoming crispness to the air. Fun abounds statewide for those in search of color and good times outdoors.

From fall festivals to apple orchards, Iowa has many fall activities to celebrate local traditions and create memories with your family. Start planning your autumn excursions today with these great resources.

Travel Iowa - lists of apple orchards and pumpkin patches, must-visit fall attractions, fall festivals, scenic drives and more

MyCountyParks.com - attend a fun fall program for the whole family at a local county park

Iowa State Park Passport- discover your new favorite parks, check in to track

your outdoor adventures and earn prizes

Sign up to get fall color reports emailed to you weekly starting Oct. 2 through the last week of October. Get details on where to see the best fall color in Iowa, along with fall travel ideas and other fun ways to get outside.

Iowa offers some stunning views during the fall months along with various ways to experience them - whether you're on a bike or hiking trail, on the water or in a car.

The northern third of Iowa peaks, depending on weather, the weekend closest to Oct. 10. The center third peaks the first to third weeks of October, and the southern third peaks the second through fourth weeks of October.

PHEASANT, Continued from Page 1C

state with 26 birds per route in 2024, with the C region reporting 22 birds/route. Counts in the EC region were statistically unchanged from 2023 but showed an upward trend. The EC region was one of the few regions that reported more hens with broods (50%) and chicks (18%) than in 2023, which led to upward trend in counts. All 3 regions should offer good to excellent hunting this fall where good quality pheasant habitat exists.

Counts in this region were highly variable with counts in the SE region showing a small upward trend, while counts in the SW region declined significantly compared to 2023 (Table 3 & Figure 5). Counts in all three regions remain below their 10-year means (Table 4). Hunters should expect bird numbers similar (SE region) or lower (SC and SW regions) compared to 2023.

A closer look at the NW region

Even with the disastrous flooding that occurred in the NW region, this region still was tops across the state with an average of 32.64 birds per count. The flooding did take its toll however, with the count down over 7 birds per route from 39.83 birds in 2023. However, compared to the other regions, the 32.64 average bird count was considerably higher than other regions. The reason comes down to the upland habitat that occurs in the NW region. So, although many of us were crushed by what could have been, the upcoming season still has the potential to be a good one. It just depends on where you hunt.

In visiting with Iowa DNR District 1 Law Enforcement Supervisor, Greg Harson, although it was a flood to remember, "We are probably where we were two to three years ago as far as bird numbers. So, we still have a good huntable population."

As always, the upland habitat is key to success. Obviously, around the rivers and streams that flooding so severely, the bird numbers will definitely be down. Even other areas across northwest Iowa, lowland areas were also affected.

Harson notes, however, pheasants are a resilient bird. "There will be good numbers in areas where the habitat is good. I'd probably stay away from the river areas. We are seeing small birds, which means they did re-nest." With crops maturing quickly and the season nearly a month away, most of the row crops will be harvested, which will push the birds into the grassy cover.

Gray partridge forecast

The gray partridge is thought of as a bonus bird for pheasant hunters. They are tough to bag, because they are often flushed accidentally, surprising hunters with their flush.

The 2024 statewide gray partridge count decreased significantly by 37% when compared to 2023. Typically, partridge numbers increase following mild winters and when spring/summer precipitation is well below normal. The wet spring no doubt impacted partridge reproduction.

Partridge are only found in the northern and central regions of Iowa, and counts showed downward trends in all northern regions as well as the central region. The WC and EC regions reported increases, but only the decline in the NC region was statistically significant, meaning there was no consistent trend in gains verses losses among routes within most regions.

This year's statewide estimate is 26% below the 10-year mean and 56% below the long-term mean. Gray partridge prefer the wide-open and treeless agricultural lands of the northern two-thirds of the state. The NW, NC, and C regions reported the best densities in 2024. Better counts in 2024 came from Buchanan, Buena Vista, Calhoun, Pocahontas, Poweshiek, and Wright counties.

Quail forecast

Iowa's statewide bobwhite quail index trended lower from last year with 0.5 quail per route in 2024 compared to 0.7 quail per route in 2023. However, the change was not statistically significant. This is related to the variation in quail counts across the state this year, with higher counts in the WC and SE regions lower counts in the SC region, and no change in counts in the SW region.

This year's statewide quail index is 49% below the 10-year average and 62% below the long-term mean. DNR staff reported coveys appeared very stressed in the SC region during the mid-January blizzard, but in other regions like the WC, the blizzard was less severe. Counts showed no statistically significant trend in any Southern region this year. Staff detected similar brood numbers in 2024. The SW region reported the best overall quail numbers in 2024, followed by the WC region. Better counts in 2024 came from Adams, Cass, Crawford, Guthrie, Mills, Page, Shelby and Wayne counties. Hunters should focus quail hunting where there is a good mix of shrubs, ag fields and weedy habitat.

Administration announces more than \$24 million from investing in America Agenda to restore nation's lands and waters

WASHINGTON - As the nation kicks off Climate Week, the Department of the Interior recently announced more than \$24 million from President Biden's Investing in America agenda to restore our nation's lands and waters. The funding from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law will support 50 ecosystem restoration projects that include on-the-ground action in 34 states and multiple U.S. Territories, as well as many projects that provide nationwide benefits, building climate resilience, improved habitats, and healthier communities.

"At a time when tackling the dual climate and biodiversity crises could not be more critical, these investments in clean air, wildlife habitat, cultural resources, and open spaces will benefit people, wildlife and local economies for generations to come," said Secretary Deb Haaland. "Through the President's Investing in America agenda, we have transformational resources to advance locally led, partnership driven projects that will catalyze nature-based solutions and build resilient communities and landscapes."

Through the Investing in America agenda, the Department is stewarding an overall \$2 billion over five years in new investments to put people to work restoring our nation's lands and waters. To guide these historic investments, and in support of the President's America the Beautiful initiative, the Department unveiled the Restoration and Resilience Framework to catalyze coordination and drive transformational outcomes across new and existing restoration programs and initiatives. Funding builds on over 600 proj-

ects previously announced to improve the nation's natural infrastructure. Projects selected will advance the three pillars of the Restoration and Resilience Framework: building climate resilience and addressing climate change impacts; restoring healthy lands and waters; and enhancing communities' quality of life. Many projects are locally led, and most will be conducted in partnerships with states, Tribes, U.S. Territories or non-profit organizations. At least 40 percent of all investments will benefit historically underserved communities, advancing President Biden's "Justice40 Initiative, which aims to deliver 40 percent of the overall benefits of certain federal climate, clean energy, and related investments to disadvantaged communities.

Phase 4 projects announced today include many that support the keystone initiatives outlined in the Restoration and Resilience Framework, including: More than \$4.5 million to advance co-stewardship and salmon restoration in Alaska's Yukon, Kuskokwim and Norton Sound region, through the Department's Gravel to Gravel Initiative. Salmon in the region hold deep cultural, subsistence and ecosystem significance. In partnership with Tribes, Indigenous leaders, other agencies and community partners, the initiative is bringing Indigenous Knowledge and the best available science to the table to inform plans for collective action to support resilient ecosystems and communities in the region and make immediate investments to respond to the salmon crisis. More than \$5.3 million to protect, conserve and restore

Central Grasslands and restore bison populations, through the Department's Grasslands Initiative. Grasslands are home to hundreds of plants and animal species with rich ties to the people and communities who live, work and thrive in these areas. The initiative, working collaboratively with farmers and ranchers, state and local leaders, Tribal Nations, the outdoor recreation community, private landowners, and others will utilize Indigenous Knowledge, restore bison populations, and protect numerous bird, bee and butterfly populations that are declining precipitously as their grassland habitats disappear.

More than \$3.4 million to advance the National Seed Strategy. Native plant communities across the United States are being lost every day due to climate-related impacts, such as longer wildfire seasons and other extreme weather events. Actions to conserve and restore native plant communities, such as supporting a robust native seed supply chain, are important strategic components of emergency preparedness, sustaining biodiversity, and landscape resilience. Through the National Seed Strategy Keystone Initiative, the Department is updating and expanding Tribal greenhouse facilities, assisting local farmers in transitioning from high-water crops to low-water native plant crops, engaging youth in native seed collection via the Seeds of Success program, and increasing regional seed production capacity. More than \$3 million to restore strategic areas in the sagebrush ecosystem. Spanning over 175 million acres in the Western United States, sagebrush country contains biological, cultural and economic resources

of national significance. Due to bi-ome-level threats, these landscapes are dramatically degrading. As part of the Sagebrush Keystone Initiative, funding will support 12 projects across the Sagebrush Collaborative Restoration Landscapes and will help address the major threats to sagebrush habitat, including projects to control invasive species, manage fire risk, and reduce the encroachment of nuisance conifer trees that crowd out the sagebrush.

More than \$2.5 million to reduce the impacts from mining and address the critical intersection of ecological, social and economic needs of Appalachia, through its Appalachia Keystone Initiative. The Department is working to restore native vegetation and reduce hazards from legacy mining activities, advance biodiversity, and improve access to outdoor spaces while helping working families across the region.

\$1 million to prevent imminent extinction of Hawaiian forest birds, through the Hawaiian Forest Bird Keystone Initiative, which employs a multi-pronged and bio-cultural approach for native bird conservation and avian malaria control in collaboration with the Native Hawaiian Community.

Investments will support projects in fiscal year 2025 and beyond and will be stewarded by the Department's Bureau of Indian Affairs, Bureau of Land Management, Bureau of Reclamation, National Park Service, Office of Insular Affairs, Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and U.S. Geological Survey.

Outdoor Connection



Andy Johnson with his 26-inch big walleye he caught on Saturday, Sept. 7.

Photo submitted

PIGLIFT teams trigger walleye bite

By STEVE WEISMAN
OUTDOOR EDITOR

For the past 36 years, the Pocahontas Iowa Great Lakes Fishing Tournament (PIGLIFT) kind of kicked off the fall walleye season! Always held the same weekend as the Iowa vs Iowa State football game, PIGLIFT is a three-partner fishing tournament where one of the partners must have lived at one time in Pocahontas, and let me tell you, these teams know how to catch walleyes.

The limit has always been five walleyes with a minimum length of 14 inches. For many years, it was a catch and weigh format, and no slot fish could be entered. There was always a concern about the stress on the fish in the live-wells, so a few years ago, PIGLIFT officials went to a catch, measure, photo and release. To spread out the opportunity to win the big stringer of fish, if a team won on Saturday, they could not win on Sunday!

This was so much better for the fish, and it also gave the teams the opportunity to measure their best five walleyes, including slot fish. Thus, it became a true catch and measure and total their best fish. At the same time, a panfish (crappies and bluegills) division has

also been held, but the panfish continue to be brought to the scales to be weighed.

At the same time, each day's tournament results, instead of being a weigh-in held on the shores of Big Spirit, have now been moved to Kabele's Trading Post. Panfish are brought in coolers or pails, weighed and then returned to the teams to be cleaned.

2024 results

Well, 2024 (September 7-8) was definitely a good one with the walleyes taken on Big Spirit Lake. On Saturday, the team of Marty Cundiff, Ed Vierow and Dewayne Schuler combined for a five-fish limit of 110.5 inches. That's an average of 22.1 inches per fish!

The big walleye award on Saturday for a 26-incher caught by Andy Johnson with his teammates Scott Johnson and Evan Johnson.

The team of Travis Shimon and Austin Kakacek won the overall length in the walleye category on Sunday with 110 inches. That's averaging 22 inches per fish. The big walleye measured on Sunday was a 25.5 incher caught by the team of Cundiff, Vierow and Schuler.

As for the panfish division, the team of Dean Weydert, Cole Dickey and Nate Kajewski took the panfish title on Saturday with a 10-crappie limit weight of 8 pounds, 10 ounces, while the

Was the bite good? Well, if it had been two full days and five fish, it would not have been very good. Especially over the course of eight hours for each day. However, that's not how things went.

Sunday winning team of B. J. Bunda, Mike Hoover and Cale Hoover boated a 10-panfish limit weight of 6 pounds.

The walleye bite

Was the bite good? Well, if it had been two full days and five fish, it would not have been very good. Especially over the course of eight hours for each day. However, that's not how things went.

How about this? A total of 170 walleyes 14 inches and over were measured with 73 landing in the 19-25-inch slot. Over the two days, there were eight teams who had figured out the pattern. Five of the teams caught over 15 measurable walleyes during the two-day tournament. Definitely not too shabby!

What worked

For this information, I reached out to Howard Pattee, a Pocahontas native and the man who started PIGLIFT 36 years ago. Although he no longer organizes and runs the tournament, he still enjoys

fishing it. Here is his take on 2024...

For all those 36 years, the key for the PIGLIFT teams has been to troll crankbaits in the basin of Big Spirit. The key has been to troll between 2-3 mph to eliminate water and to trigger reactionary strikes. Certainly, some years were better than others, but still year in and year out, the crankbait presentation was the answer.

That again held true in 2024, but with maybe a little twist. Over the years, lead core was used to get the baits down, but this year the top teams used snap weights to get the crankbait out quickly, to a predetermined depth with the ability to fish closer to the boat. Then it was the matter of finding the depth that the active walleyes were located and letting the fish tell the teams what the color and desired speed was. The top bait used was the Salmo Hornet.

Yup, PIGLIFT is over for 2024, and it appears the fall crankbait bite is on... once again!

Getting low on bait

By BOB JENSEN
FISHING THE MIDWEST FISHING TEAM

When we go fishing, if we get low on bait, that's usually a good thing. It means that the fish have been biting. In my many years of fishing, I've had the good fortune to run low on bait a few times. I've even run completely out of bait on several occasions.

Lately I've been thinking about past fishing experiences. I've accepted that I have more days on the water behind me than ahead of me, and that's okay. When I reminisce about such things, I think about the many changes that have taken place in fishing and the business of fishing communications.

In the late 70's, when it came to fishing equipment, our choices were limited compared to today. Graphite rods were just appearing on the scene, and monofilament line was the only option for most freshwater fishing applications. Lure selection was minimal, and we went to a tackle shop to buy our fishing equipment. No mail-order.

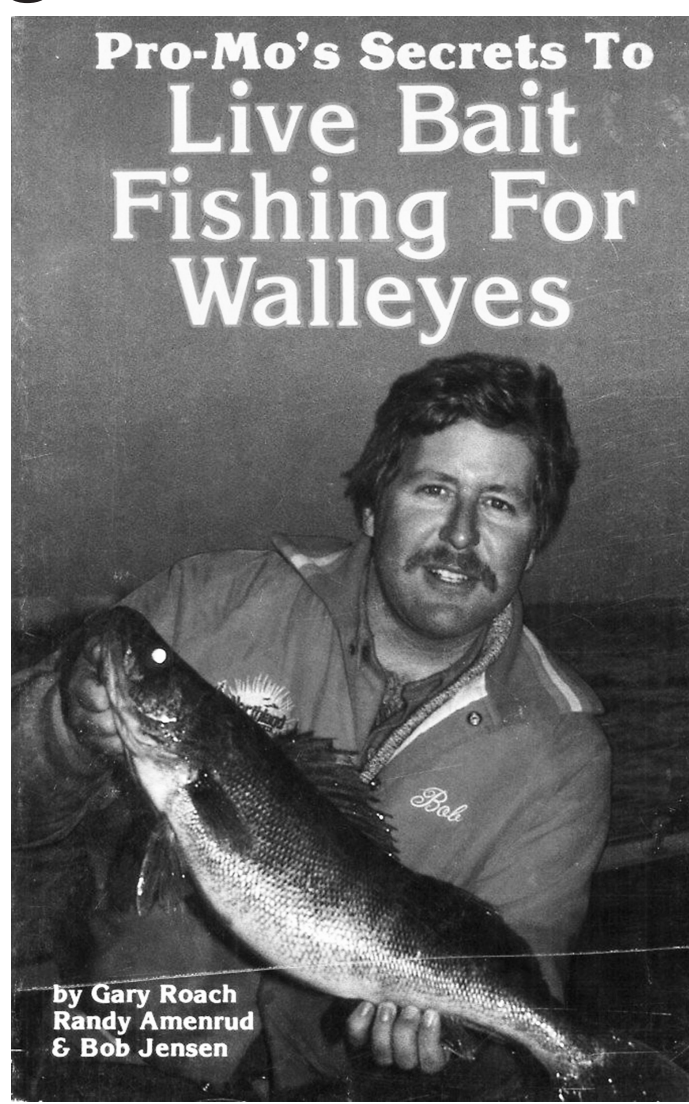
An eighteen foot aluminum boat with a fifty horsepower tiller motor was the gold standard. There would be a foot trim and a flasher depth-finder in the back by the boat driver. On the bow was another flasher and an electric motor. At the time that was as good as it got. That set-up is still a heck of a fish-catchin' rig.

A trip to a lake a couple of hours away was a serious undertaking. Trailer problems were common, and the roads weren't as good as they are now. Fisher-people today are much more mobile.

The catching part of fishing was good back in the day, but time can cloud memories. In many places, for quality and quantity, catching today is as good as and even better than it used to be. Not everywhere, but in some places.

When I lived in Walker Minnesota in the early 80's, walleyes and muskies were the big deal. Not many fished for largemouth bass even though the lakes were full of them. That's changed. Today, largemouth and smallmouth bass are just as popular as walleyes in areas that used to be strictly Walleye Country.

In the mid-80's, Gary Roach, Randy Amenrud, and I teamed up to write a book about using



Bob Jensen on the cover of Live Bait Fishing for Walleyes. Photo submitted

jigs to catch walleyes. We collaborated on the content of the book, and I organized the text and photos. I wrote the book, Secrets to Jigging for Walleyes, on my typewriter. It took six months to complete the book. It sold very well so we decided to write another book.

Before the second book I entered the computer age. It took six weeks to complete the book. Computers and digital photography have made life so much simpler and productive.

Then came the internet. Fishing information became more abundant and more immediate. If an angler caught a big fish in the morning, the fishing world knew about it that afternoon.

Anglers on all levels have become more interested in fishing regulations. There is constant debate about things such as walleye limits, protected seasons, size limits and more. There are disagreements, and that's good if we can disagree without being disagreeable. The anglers who are debating

the various topics, regardless of their position on the topic, truly care about the resource.

All that leads up to this

Sometimes we run low on bait. I don't go fishing as much as I used to, and I'm running low on fresh ideas for fishing articles. I've had the wonderful opportunity to produce hundreds of television and radio shows, articles, and seminars about fishing. Early on, I promised myself that I would get out before I got stale. I may have been stale when I started this fishing journey, but I know I'm stale now. It's time for me to step aside and let someone else share their fishing stories and fishing ideas.

I always ended my television and radio shows with the suggestion "Be nice to one another." It's not that hard to do. Be patient at the boat ramp. Don't brag about catching a five pounder unless it weighs at least three pounds. With that, be nice to one another, I'll see you at the lake!

SWAN, Continued from Page 1C

to overflowing. Now with the drier conditions since August, there is hope for completing the project this fall.

According to Hawkins, "We're going to try this one last time this fall. We're going to do an open water treatment if we can get the water levels down far enough and kill off the carp."

"We need the lake down about three to three-and-a-half feet," Hawkins says. "It's all just mathematics and how much of the chemical we have available and the logistics and the expense of doing that."

Hawkins says one side of the lake has dropped enough, and the hope is that the water level on the other side will fall and match it. The dry weather is helping to complete this process.

Hawkins says regardless of the outcome of the carp eradication effort, West Swan Lake will be restocked in the spring with northern pike, yellow perch, blue gills and largemouth bass.

History of shallow lake renovations

For the past 18 years, the Iowa DNR has worked yearly to "turn the switch" on shallow

water lakes. Once healthy and vibrant ecosystems, for a variety of reasons have become nothing but a shell of what they once were. Most have become devoid of plant life, have very poor water quality and are overrun by rough fish such as bullheads and carp.

The good news is through an aggressive lake restoration plan, these water bodies are brought back to life by "turning the switch." To "turn the switch" is usually at least a three-year process that most often takes a drastic drawdown (simulating a drought situation), an elimination of the rough fish and a chance for the vegetation to rejuvenate itself. This is followed by refilling and native fish stockings.

One of the most recently renovated lakes is Little Swan Lake, a 371-acre shallow water lake north of Superior. Since its completion in 2023, the "switch has been turned" with improved water quality, good emergent vegetation and a growing fish population. For much of the open water season, anglers have been catching nice eating size perch, which makes the potential for an excellent ice fishing season.

ALASKA, Continued from Page 1C

Columbia. Each segment on this journey held incredible experiences. However, that would be pages, so I'll hit what we think are our top three: Juneau, cruising Glacier Bay and charter fishing out of Ketchikan.

Juneau

Juneau is the capital of Alaska, and one of the oldest cities in the state. We knew there would be several whale excursions, but we had heard that Juneau was one of the top options, so we chose to do the Alaska Tales whale excursion with Captain James and crew members Monica and Kirston.

Randy, who was our bus driver to and from the dock, gave an informative narrative about Juneau the wildlife, the fish and the people. One little tidbit...even though Juneau has a population of 32,000+ people, there are no roads in or out of Juneau because it is surrounded by water on one side and huge mountains and glaciers on the other. At the same time, there are 13,000 bald eagles but, get this, no moose! Randy took us by the famous Mendenhall Glacier and its popular Glacier Visitor Center. The Mendenhall Glacier is well over 13 miles long, dropping 4,500 feet over that stretch and is the only glacier in Alaska that is accessible by road.

The tour lasted two full hours, with a solid hour spent in the middle of humpback whale waters. The captain worked to keep the boat always around spouting humpback whales, and Monica and Kirston helped us move around the boat so we could be

up top, up front or in the back. Our favorite pictures were the ones where the humpbacks would show their tail (fluking) as they begin a deep dive. I would guess we saw a minimum of 50 humpbacks during that hour, along with three orcas! There is always the chance to see other wildlife like the sea lions lounging around Benjamin Island.

Glacier Bay

Immense and awe-inspiring are the two words my wife and I used to describe Glacier Bay National Park. Our cruise boat was able to slowly enter the bay and move along the rugged mountains. Our daily bulletin noted that "the park itself covers 3 million acres of rugged mountains, incredible glaciers, temperate rainforest, wild coastlines and deep sheltered fjords. Glacier Bay National Park is a highlight of Alaska's Inside Passage and part of a 25-million-acre World Heritage Site—one of the world's largest international protected areas. From sea to summit, Glacier Bay offers unlimited opportunities for adventure and inspiration." Our park ranger noted that there are over 1,000 glaciers in the park itself.

Highlight for us was seeing Hubbard Glacier with the park ranger describing it as this continent's largest tidewater glacier, a full 76 miles in length, 7 miles wide and an incredible 600 feet in height! Lots and lots of pictures! Plus, we got to see and hear "calving," when chunks of ice break off and land in the water. Definitely an awesome excursion.

The park ranger also mentioned an unusual phenomenon, that of the blue bears, an uncommon color variant of the black bear. The ranger noted that the fur ranges from white to grey to black to silver tipped. These bears are found only in this part of Alaska and a small portion of western Canada.

Ketchikan

What can I say? After all, Ketchikan has the reputation of being the "salmon capital of the world!" Since the Norwegian Sun was only in port for approximately six hours, my chance of getting on a salmon charter was going to be a four-hour opportunity. However, I did get on a private charter with the Alaska Catch! Four others joined me on Captain Ted's salmon boat. Our chances were not good with rain falling throughout the morning and night, stormy weather over the previous couple of days had really stirred up the water.

We hit three different areas in search of silver salmon, since the king salmon bite had really slowed down. Over the course of the fishing excursion, we fished in depths of 130' to over 1200' with the goal of targeting suspended silver salmon. Captain Ted put out six different rigs with different color spoons and a flasher to help attract the salmon. Two on downriggers set at a specific depth, while the other four were shallower.

Yes, the bite, as expected, was slow. However, we picked up two silver salmon, one a 6 pounder and the other a solid 8 pounds. Something that totally amazed me was the depth of wa-

ter. With rocky, tree laden islands, I could not believe we could be in 150 then 480, then 800 and finally 1200 feet of water! We tried spot after spot, and even ran nearly 30 miles away from our port.

As we trolled, the rain just kept coming down, but the five of us had the luxury of sitting under the cab, protected from rain and wind. As we trolled, we learned that Captain Ted grew up in Michigan and fished salmon there since childhood, until about 5 years ago, when he moved up to Ketchikan and began guiding for Alaska Catch.

Unfortunately, the wind kicked up with gusts over 30 mph. So, our return to the harbor was into the wind, fighting 5+ foot swells. Never any worry or concern: Captain Ted navigated the angry waters with care and the knowledge that had come from both years on Lake Michigan and now Ketchikan. Yes, we wanted to all catch some silver salmon, but it wasn't in the cards! As always, that's why they call it fishing, not catching!

Worth it

Amazing how fast a 9-day cruise can go by with so many incredible sights along the way. Most definitely this cruise to Alaska had been on our bucket list for decades. I'm sure it's the same on many cruises and cruise companies, but on this Norwegian Sun cruise, we met so many nice people, both Americans and foreigners, both young and old...all of us experiencing "Alaska, the Last Frontier." Yes, we each took hundreds of pictures that will forever keep our Alaskan visit close at hand!

NATURE'S COLORFUL CAST



PAINTED TURTLE AT ELINOR BEDELL STATE PARK



BALTIMORE ORIOLE IN THE BACK YARD



NORTHERN FLICKER IN THE BACK YARD

PHOTOS BY MIKE FREDRICKSON
TO BUY PHOTOS, CONTACT MIKE AT 712-209-4907



JUVENILE CEDAR WAXWING AT ELINOR BEDELL STATE PARK



RED-TAILED HAWK AT LITTLE SWAN LAKE

Inspiration for Our Day- "But as for you, be strong and do not give up, for your work will be rewarded." ~2 Chronicles 15:7

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