



# OUTDOOR CONNECTION

STORIES, ADVICE, AND INFORMATION FOR OUTDOOR LOVERS

"We don't know a lot about how well they (the paddlefish) will survive, and if they will actually stay in the lake, or what they will do and where they will go. So, to answer some of those questions, we are implanting tags into the body cavity of the fish."

—Mike Hawkins, Iowa DNR Fisheries Biologist



Tanks at the Spirit Lake Hatchery held the incoming paddlefish before they were stocked in West Lake Okoboji.

Photo by Steve Weisman

## They're BACK

American paddlefish once again swimming in West Lake Okoboji

By STEVE WEISMAN  
Outdoor Editor

After over 100 years, they're back! The much anticipated "re-stocking" of the American paddlefish into West Lake Okoboji began Tuesday, October 8 with a release at the Emerson Bay Boat Ramp in Emerson Bay.

According to Mike Hawkins, Iowa DNR Fisheries Biologist, "Our hatchery staff did a great job of dialing in the hauling densities and handling techniques." A total of 1900 paddlefish, which had been raised at the Lake Rathbun Hatchery and transported to the Spirit Lake, were then placed in tanks at the

Spirit Lake Hatchery and after stress relief, they were then stocked in West Lake Okoboji over a period of several days.

In addition, on Wednesday afternoon, 25 of the paddlefish were implanted with acoustic tags so that their movements can be studied over the next one and a half years. With 20 acoustic receivers on the bottom of the lake, the receivers will log seasonal migration around the lake and identify if the fish are leaving the lakes system. Once a fish is "heard" by the receiver, it records the exact date and time that the fish swam by. Biologists can then download

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Mike Hawkins, Fisheries Biologist, holds one of the recent paddlefish arrivals to the Spirit Lake Hatchery before their eventual release at the Emerson Bay Boat Ramp.

Photo by Steve Weisman

## A look at the 2024 pheasant opener

By STEVE WEISMAN  
Outdoor Editor

With the 2024 pheasant opener in the books, let's take a look at how things went over the expanse of 16 counties in northwest Iowa. According to District 1 Captain, Greg Harson, DNR law enforcement officers checked hunting groups throughout the district and were pleased with the way hunters handled themselves and found very few compliance issues. "As a whole, we felt that hunter numbers were down compared to the last few years, especially last year, and we did not check as many out of staters."

As far as birds bagged, across the entire District 1 area, from the bags checked, Harson notes, "The average was a little less than one bird per hunter." It seemed that officers found better bag numbers the farther south in the district. "The counties of Buena Vista, Sac, Ida and Pocahontas seemed to have better bird numbers."

Of course, there were hunters who did very well and ended up with three-bird limits. Some of these came on state land, while private land with good upland habitat produced well. The larger the party of hunters, the more difficult it was to approach a bag limit.

According to Harson, it seemed that the best areas were with harvested cornfields next to good upland habitat. Dry conditions did cause some issues with dogs being able to follow a scent, especially when working for a downed/wounded bird. At the same time, Sunday's increasing winds made it more difficult with birds flushing wild. The larger the area, the more difficult it was to get the birds, whether they were runners or early fliers.

Of course, things will change, they always do, when the temperatures drop, and inclement weather (snow) arrives. This will push the birds into heavier cover.



Opening day was good for Al Regelstad and Isaac Regalstad with a two-person rooster pheasant limit. Of course, the main stars of the hunt include the two hunting dogs: Nellie (L) and Sophie (R).

Photo by Isaac Regalstad

## Oh, for the memories

From the time I was a little kid, I lived for the opener of pheasant season. And why not? I lived on a farm several miles south of Redfield in north-central South Dakota, a town that was widely acclaimed as the "Pheasant Capital of the World!" As a grade schooler in the late mid to late 50s, I could not wait until the South Dakota opener the third Saturday of October.

Since the opener never started before noon and we hunted my dad's and neighbors' standing corn fields, shelterbelts and grasslands, my mom would take me up to Redfield to go by the Redfield airport on the outskirts of town.

Why? Well, we'd go slow and stop at an approach, and



Steve Weisman  
Outdoor Editor

I'd start counting airplanes that had carried out-of-state hunters from all over the country and beyond! It was nothing for me to count at least 100 planes. Information from the local paper in 1962 noted that somewhere around 150 planes had landed at the Redfield airport. That's not to count the countless out of town hunters that

had arrived by car!

I was in awe as my mom drove into Redfield, and we saw all the cars parked and hunters just about everywhere! Hardware stores, restaurants and gas stations were packed.

Some visitors would be there for just the weekend; others were there for five days. However, over the first two weeks of the season, outgoing airplanes were replaced with incoming airplanes day after day.

It didn't matter to me as a grade schooler, but famous people in all walks of life, from athletes to ball players to actors...heck, even Ty Cobb came to pheasant hunt back in the day.

### Cool, but how about the hunt!

In the late 50's I was too young to carry a gun, but I was sure included in the hunts. My dad, uncles and other neighbors were all farmers, and we'd get together to work corn fields, shelterbelts and soil bank acres pushing with several drivers, while others blocked at the end of the field. The walkers always walked in a line for safety. There was no rush, because we wanted to make the pheasants nervous and get them to flush. In those days, none of the hunters had a dog, so I guess I was there to do the job of a hunting dog. In addition, it was my job to be a

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Six-year-old Curt Weisman (middle) holds two of the five rooster pheasants that dad (Steve) and grandpa (Elton) had bagged on the Weisman farm.

Photo by Darial Weisman

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# Lots of activities beginning in early November

## Upcoming outdoor events

By STEVE WEISMAN  
OUTDOOR EDITOR

As we move toward the month of November, there are sooooo many hunting and fishing opportunities. There is so much that it's easy to catch yourself coming and going.

However, there are some things coming up in November that are worth checking out.

### Kabele's Shop with the Pros - Fish & Hunt

I know it's early, but one of the buzz words right now is the upcoming ice fishing season. So, the first event will be on Saturday, November 9 with the Kabele's Shop with the Pros Day. It has become one of the most an-

icipated ice fishing kick-off events in the Midwest.

Thane and Tanya Johnson, owners of Kabele's Trading Post in Spirit Lake, are preparing for their 12th annual Shop with the Pros Day! It's really a day designed for all outdoors people with both fishing and hunting products and accessories on display.

Several pro staffers and manufacturer reps will be on hand (check out Kabele's Facebook page for a full-page flyer), along with a wide range of in-house special discounts. Lunch will be provided by Taco Torres from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m., in the specially heated tent with plenty of seating.

The highlight will be near the end of the day around 3:15 p.m., with the drawing for the special \$1,000 Kabele's Shopping Spree.

### IGLFC's Annual DNR Night

Mark your calendar for Thursday, Nov. 14 and the annual fall DNR Night at Oak Hill Outdoor located on the north end of Milford. DNR personnel from fisheries and law enforcement will give summaries of each department's activities for 2024. The IGLFC will provide free pizza for members and their families. Non-members are welcome to attend and can join the IGLFC for \$25 and also enjoy the free pizza.

The night will also be a time to honor veterans, along with the announcing of raffle ticket winners for one of the club's major fundraisers. "As a club, we appreciate the efforts of our veterans and want to recognize each of them with a special rod and reel."

Thomsen says, "We really have a great lineup

of prizes to be raffled off. We have 40 major fishing prizes worth over \$17,000. This raffle is one of the ways that we come up with the funds to help with our youth programs, and we appreciate both club members and the general public for helping us fund our programs."

Some of the top prizes include the following:  
1st place - Minn Kota Ulterra Trolling Motor (112# thrust)

Helix 10 MegaSIG4N  
Fenwick Open Water Combo  
Scheels \$250 Gift Card  
W.C.R Pannier Bandit Sr w/Club Decal + Freedom Baitz Package, Walker Custom Rods

According to Thomsen, raffle tickets will cost \$10 each with all proceeds going to help fund future projects for youngsters. Interested parties can check out the local bait shops and

Fisherman's Factory Outlet to purchase raffle tickets, or they can go on the Iowa Great Lakes Fishing Club's website <https://iagreatlakesfishingclub.org/> and purchase raffle tickets right online.

### The Hook UP Ice Extravaganza

The Hook Up at Oak Hill Outdoor, located across the road to the south of Perkins at the north end of Milford, will host its 5th annual Ice Extravaganza on Saturday, November 26 with doors opening at 9 a.m. It's a great way to walk off a little of that Thanksgiving dinner and to make final preparations for the opening of the ice season. The day will be filled with deals, in-store specials along with pro staffers and product reps on hand to answer questions and provide demonstrations.

## Enjoy Iowa's natural landscapes fishing rivers and streams this fall

DES MOINES — What a long and beautiful fall Iowans have experienced, and it appears there will be more. Fall is a great time to catch fish in Iowa's rivers. A unique angling challenge is hidden around every bend.

"You are never far from one of Iowa's many rivers," said Greg Gelwicks, Iowa DNR interior rivers research biologist. "Fall is a great time to give them a try."

Fish become more active and hungry when the stream temperature drops. "Look for actively feeding fish where riffles enter pools or rocky areas," Gelwicks said. "They sit there out of the current and wait for food to come by."

Many fish in Iowa's rivers search out deep pools with very little current to spend the winter. Fish start to move to overwintering areas in October, and most fish will arrive by November.

Fish may move to deep water earlier than normal this fall with low water levels in many of Iowa rivers. "Anglers willing to brave chilly temperatures can be rewarded if they also seek out these areas,"

Gelwicks said.

Channel catfish will move to the deepest holes they can find in larger streams, often with depths greater than 15 feet, if available. Walleyes can be found in these same pools, but will also use slightly shallower areas with little current. Look for smallmouth bass in deep holes with boulders or woody structure.

When fish first move to wintering holes, deep running crankbaits and jigs with plastics work well. As water temperatures drop, switch to a jig and minnow fished slowly for best results. Try the upper Wapsipicon River (Buchanan and Linn counties) or upper Cedar River (Black Hawk and Bremer counties) for smallmouth bass. The Shell Rock River (Butler and Bremer counties) or upper Cedar Rivers (Black Hawk or Bremer Counties) are a great choice for walleye.

An extensive list of Iowa's rivers, with information on access points and native species, is available on the DNR website at [www.iowadnr.gov/Fishing/Where-to-Fish/Interior-Rivers](http://www.iowadnr.gov/Fishing/Where-to-Fish/Interior-Rivers).

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this data periodically and determine patterns of movement.

Hawkins explains, "We don't know a lot about how well they will survive, and if they will actually stay in the lake, or what they will do and where they will go. So, to answer some of those questions, we are implanting tags into the body cavity of the fish."

Stocking on both Wednesday and Thursday took place between 2-3 p.m. Friday was designated as media/general public day at Emerson Bay Boat Ramp as the final 400 paddlefish were released into West Lake Okoboji at approximately 1 p.m. Hawkins noted that area media were alerted of the Press Day stocking and that all people interested in viewing the stocking were invited. A crowd of an estimated crowd of around 40 interested spectators stood on both sides of the truck at the ramp and took lots of photos.

Hawkins talked about the fish being stocked. "These paddlefish are from a wild population with great wild genetics. To ensure good stocking conditions, we waited until the water cooled down in our area lakes, and then brought the fish from the Rathbun Hatchery in southern Iowa."

These fish, even though it has been documented that they can live for as long as 50 years and can become extremely large, pose no threat to other fish and humans. They eat by simply swimming around with their mouth open and inside their mouth are structures called gill rakers. As they swim, tiny plankton is trapped by the gill rakers and then swallowed. Although they eat tiny food, as they grow, they definitely eat lots of it!

### Historical data

According to Hawkins, research shows that this fish has been gone from the Iowa Great Lakes since about



Paddlefish ready to be released into West Lake Okoboji.

Photo by Steve Weisman

1919, and as far as the DNR can tell, the paddlefish were native to the Iowa Great Lakes. Historically, there are lots of photographs floating around of paddlefish being taken in the early 1900s through about 1919.

Hawkins says, "They probably disappeared because of fragmentation of the river systems with the dams that were put in place. Those dams would stop the upstream migration. These fish don't reproduce in lake systems and are a river fish." Before the dams, the paddlefish would make the long migration to the Iowa Great Lakes.

The American paddlefish is actually the only species of paddlefish left in the world. Restoration efforts have been very successful across the Midwest and here in the Missouri and Mississippi river systems in Iowa. In Iowa, there is actually a limited season on paddlefish on the Missouri River side and the Big Sioux River in the state.

Hawkins says, "The Iowa Great Lakes because of its history of having paddlefish was a natural choice to do some stocking here." They are a big fish with stories and pictures from the early 1900s of fish of 185 pounds and even one (not documented) of 210 pounds, both caught on West Okoboji

### Information from the Iowa DNR

Currently, there is a paddlefish snagging season on the Missouri and Big Sioux Rivers beginning on February 1 through April 30. Anglers fishing for paddlefish must have a valid Iowa fishing license, along with a special paddlefish license and unused transportation tag(s). There is the possibility this might become a recreational opportunity several years down the road.

## State park campgrounds getting ready for winter

DES MOINES — Another busy camping year in Iowa state parks is coming to an end and staff are preparing for the first freezing temperatures of the fall.

State parks will begin winterizing their facilities this week including shutting off water in the campgrounds and closing shower houses.

Campers can check the status of water availability in a particular park by going to [iowadnr.gov/parkclosures](http://iowadnr.gov/parkclosures). The page is updated regularly by park staff.

If campers have any questions about water or other facilities during the time of their stay, they should contact the park directly. RV campers are reminded that dump stations are closed during the winter. While Iowa's interstate rest areas no longer offer dump stations, the DOT does provide a list of dump station alternatives on their website.

Additionally, state park campsites switch to lower, off-season rates starting October 16. While water may be shut off, visitors are encouraged to continue camping and enjoying park amenities. Several parks also have year-round cabins for overnight stays. To learn more and to make a reservation, visit: <https://iowastateparks.reserveamerica.com/welcome.do>.

## Fall community trout stocking started Oct. 18

DES MOINES — A total of 18 lakes across Iowa are gearing up to receive trout this fall. The Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) will release between 1,000 to 2,000 rainbow trout at each location as part of its cool weather trout program that brings trout to areas that cannot support them during the summer months.

Locally, Scharnberg Pond located southeast of Everly is scheduled to be stocked on Saturday, November 5 at noon. Bacon Creek near Sioux City will also be stocked on Saturday, November 5 at 1:30 p.m.

The fall community trout stockings are a great place to take kids to catch their first fish. A small hook with a night crawler or corn under a small bobber or small simple spinners, such as a Panther Martin or Mepps, is all you need to get in on the fun.

Bringing trout to cities and towns offers a "close to home" option for Iowans who might not travel to northeast Iowa to discover trout fishing. A family-friendly event is often paired with the stocking to help anglers have success and fun while fishing. Check the Iowa DNR Trout Fishing website to see which lakes are having events.

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. The child can purchase a trout fee which will allow them to catch their own limit.

## Soil quality restoration

By JOHN H. WILLS  
CLEAN WATER ALLIANCE COORDINATOR

I am often asked the question, "What can I do to improve the water quality of my lake?" I always immediately state, join a lake protective association because they function in our best interests. However, an easy thing that everyone who owns property can do is to soil quality restoration.

### What is Soil Quality Restoration?

Soil quality restoration (SQR) is the process of improving soil health on new or existing lawns. The process uses tillage, aeration and compost to increase infiltration and organic matter content. Soil quality restoration leads to healthier, more functional soils and to landscapes that can absorb more rain and shed less runoff.

### Why restore soil quality?

Grading activities associated with urban development create poor quality soils that are compacted and low in organic matter. Yards with poor soil quality require more time, money, water and fertilizer to stay green and maintain a lush appearance.

Unfortunately, problems such as standing water, inability to mow after rainfall, patchy grass and poor grass establishment are associated with poor soil quality. These soil conditions also contribute to water quality issues by shedding runoff during rainfall events; and by transporting pesticides, sediments, and fertilizers to nearby water bodies.

Soil quality restoration reduces compaction, increases pore space in the soil, and improves organic matter content. This improves the health and functionality of soils. Organic matter gives the landscape the ability to act like a sponge and absorb rain. Soils rich in organic matter also support entire ecosystems of beneficial organisms (microbes, worms, insects) that contribute to healthy lawns.

### Improving existing lawns

Create healthier soils by adding organic matter to an existing lawn.

Contact Iowa One Call to have utilities located.



Side by side - Soil Quality Restoration on the left versus a lawn that has had no Soil Quality Restoration.

Photo by John Wills

Locate and mark in-ground sprinklers and invisible fences.

Mow lawn to a height of 2 inches.

Aerate the lawn with a plug or deep tine aerator.

Apply 1/2 to 3/4 inch of compost to increase the organic matter content of the lawn.

Apply grass seed over patchy turf, if needed, with a species that matches current yard grass.

Establishment and maintenance

While soil quality restoration reduces future yard work, some maintenance is required during the first 7-10 days while grass establishes. Below is a list of maintenance requirements:

Identify areas of thicker compost and pull grass blades through compost layer with a rake.

Do not let grass be completely covered for more than three days.

Overseed areas without turfgrass and do not disturb those areas.

Water as needed if seeded, depending upon rainfall.

Loosen areas of crusted or compacted compost with a rake.

Temporarily control erosion in steep areas.

Clean compost off impervious surfaces (driveways and sidewalks)

Healthy soil is the key to reducing polluted runoff. As buildings, and houses are built, topsoil is stripped and stockpiled and the remaining subsoil is compacted by grading and construction activities that include the use of heavy equipment and vehicles. Very little topsoil is usually replaced on lawn areas. Property owners are left with lawns that have little topsoil that is heavily compacted along with subsoil, usually with a high clay content and little organic matter after construction is complete.

Topsoil is important because it provides readily available nutrients to plants. Organic matter is important as well because it acts as a sponge in soil to soak up rainfall resulting in less runoff and makes water readily available to grass and plants.

Lawns with good soil quality reduce the need for watering and minimize the need for fertilizers and pesticides. Healthy turfgrass that grows in healthy soil has deeper roots that can better withstand summer dry spells and minimize excess additions of fertilizers.

Plant roots growing in compacted soils are unable to penetrate the soil and absorb water and nutrients. This requires more fertilizers and pesticides, both of which could end up in runoff

and contribute to pollution in local creeks and streams.

Soil quality restoration is the process of improving soil health on new or existing lawns. It is simple - start by reducing soil compaction through tillage or aeration and increasing organic matter content with the addition of high-quality topsoil and/or compost. Soil quality restoration leads to healthier, more functional soils and to landscapes that can absorb more rainfall.

For every percentage of organic matter in the soil, the landscape should be able to absorb about 0.6 inches of rain without shedding that water off. Therefore, people are encouraged to "Strive for Five" percent of organic matter in their yards. If each lawn were able to have 5 percent organic matter, our lawns around the lakes would be able to absorb 3 inches of rain without shedding it in a 24-hour period.

If all goes well, this coming spring of 2025 a new program will be announced through the Dickinson SWCD to help property owners to improve the organic matter within their own lawns and properties. Stay tuned for the announcement this coming April. However, if you would like to move forward right away, let me know and I am happy to help.



Sauger and walleyes are a common catch below dams on larger rivers.

Photo by Bob Jensen

# 2024 Iowa deer hunting off to a good start

DES MOINES — Despite warm weather persisting in much of the state, roughly 6,000 deer have been registered so far through the youth and disabled hunter seasons, and the opening of the archery and early muzzleloader seasons, which is slightly higher than both last year and the five-year average.

The crop harvest, cooling temperatures and approaching rut, should increase deer activity leading to greater harvest success.

The long-anticipated rut, which will be in full swing by November, is when mature bucks spend much of their time actively tending and searching for does during daylight hours, creating opportunity for thrilling action from the tree stand at any hour of the day.

A major factor leading to Iowa's world-renowned buck quality is the simple fact that hunting during the rut — when bucks are most vulnerable — is restricted to compound and traditional bows. The archery season runs through Dec. 6, then closes for the two regular gun seasons before re-opening Dec. 23 through Jan. 10, 2025. The early muzzleloader season closed Oct. 20.

### Deer disease update

Iowa's deer population is in the midst of another outbreak of hemorrhagic disease, which tends to affect Iowa deer from late summer to early fall. Though outbreak severity varies annually, it began increasing in September, with roughly 750 related deer mortalities reported throughout the state, which is considered a moderate outbreak compared to past years.

The DNR added new online tools to the Deer Hunting webpage that allow the public to report and monitor hemorrhagic disease activity. Hemorrhagic disease has been reported in at least 78 Iowa counties, though disease activity has generally been mild at the county scale at fewer than 50 mortalities per county.



Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) continues to increase in geographic spread and prevalence, though most Iowa counties have yet to detect their first CWD-positive deer. Last year, eight new counties were added to the list: Des Moines, Guthrie, Howard, Jones, Marshall, Monroe, Muscatine, and Tama, bringing the total number of counties that have had a positive deer to 23.

Testing of hunter-harvested deer is available in each county by contacting the local DNR wildlife or law enforcement staff. Hunters can help limit the spread of chronic wasting disease by refraining from feeding/baiting deer and transporting deer carcasses across counties. The Iowa DNR primarily manages the disease in areas with moderate-to-high deer densities by adding antlerless tags within special Deer Management Zones.

# Consistent watering essential for new tree plantings

DES MOINES — Fall is usually a good time to plant trees with mild temperatures and adequate ground moisture. With drought conditions across Iowa this fall, watering newly planted trees on a regular schedule through the 2025 growing season is essential for a strong start and healthy life. Properly planted and maintained trees will have a better opportunity for a long, healthy life," said Iowa DNR district forester Mark Vitosh. "Improperly planted and maintained trees can become stressed more easily or may look otherwise healthy, but then suddenly die in the first 10 to 20 years after planting."

Shade trees can reduce heating and cooling costs, improve the air we breathe, add beauty and color to backyards, provide shelter from the wind and sun, and make our communities a better place to live. A properly planted and maintained tree will grow faster and live longer than one that is incorrectly planted.

"Properly planted and maintained trees will have a bet-

ter opportunity for a long, healthy life," said Iowa DNR district forester Mark Vitosh.

"Improperly planted and maintained trees can become stressed more easily or may look otherwise healthy, but then suddenly die in the first 10 to 20 years after planting."

Vitosh explains, "The work does not stop after planting. Proper tree health monitoring and long-term maintenance like watering, mulching, and structural pruning helps promote quality trees long-term."

Follow these simple tips to properly place and maintain a healthy tree:

• Select a species that matches your site's growing conditions (i.e. soil type, soil drainage, available growing space, full sun or shade, etc.).

• Always call Iowa One Call 811 before you start digging to locate any underground utilities.

• Remove top soil from the original root ball until you can see the first lateral root. This first main root should be just below soil grade when planting.

• Examine the root system and prune any circling roots.

• Measure the distance just above the first lateral root to the bottom of the root ball; that is the depth that you should dig the planting hole. Proper planting depth is key to long-term tree survival. If the hole is dug too deep the tree can settle over time which can cause long-term health issues.

• Dig the hole at least twice as wide as the root ball, to loosen the soil and promote good lateral root growth.

• Once the tree is planted, slowly water the planting hole (focus water in the location of the root ball) to settle the soil.

• As the tree grows, water the expanding root system further away from the initial root ball.

• If you have planted new trees within the last 3 years consider some supplemental watering during the dry conditions this fall.

• Find more tips on how to properly plant a tree, select diverse trees and proper tree care after planting on the DNR webpage at [www.iowadnr.gov/UrbanForestry](http://www.iowadnr.gov/UrbanForestry).

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spotter for downed birds and to help find them. I also get conned into carrying bagged birds for the hunters that didn't have a game carrier...that would be my dad!

The cornfields in those days were not the height of fields today, and certainly the size of the field was much smaller. The rows had lots of pigeon grass in them. That made perfect cover. The end of the field was incredible on the opener as many of the pheasants hadn't flushed, and they would erupt at the end of the field. With only waist to shoulder high corn for the men, it was pretty easy to see the birds and make the swing.

Shelterbelts were really something. Most had been planted as wind breaks several years before, so they were mature and tough to walk through. Once again, I became the flusher, moving through the shelterbelt, making as much noise as I possibly could. Some of the adults would walk on the outside edge on each side, others would spread themselves out along the length of the shelter belt, while 2-3 would block at the end. There was lots of noise as we tried to get the pheasants to erupt!

The third option was the Soil Bank. This was a program in the 1950s and 1960s that was designed to help reduce farm production, help increase prices and drive down surpluses. It paid farmers for 10 years to take land out of production. For my dad, it gave him the chance to retire some of his worst land, while helping to revitalize the ground and provide a way to protect the upland birds. It paved the way for the later Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). Most of the plantings were pretty simple: a mix of alfalfa and brome grass. However, the Soil Bank acres were also a draw for upland birds. Once the birds had been flushed from the cornfields, the birds would head to the Soil Bank, and it

# Targeting those dam fish

By Bob Jensen

FISHING THE MIDWEST FISHING TEAM

A fish was swimming upriver. What did the fish say when it swam into a concrete obstruction in the river? "Dam!"

Okay, that was kind of corny, but the dams found on the rivers that intersect North America have a special place in the memories of many anglers. The area directly below dams on rivers of all sizes have provided outstanding fishing for several species of fish for a long time.

As a youngster, I spent many afternoons in waders below dams on small rivers. My dam fishing mostly involved walleyes in the spring. The walleyes moved upstream to spawn until a dam stopped that movement.

For a couple of weeks, lots of walleyes were gathered below the dam. Fishing was good, especially for the smaller males. After the spawn, the fish would move downstream and spread out. Not so many years ago, the area di-

rectly below the dam on many smaller rivers were popular gathering spots for early season anglers.

Many of us also have memories of fishing from a boat below a variety of dams on larger rivers in the fall and winter. There is a significant fall upriver run of walleyes and sauger on many larger rivers. They move close to the dam and stay there over the colder winter months. Dams are a part of many angler's history. Today though, many of the traditional gathering spots below dams aren't as popular as they once were. Things change.

One change that explains why anglers aren't fishing below dams on small rivers as much is that the rivers have aged. Now, instead of walleyes being the primary gamefish, other species, particularly smallmouth bass, have become more abundant. And smallmouth don't seek out current to spawn as much as walleyes do, so we don't see them gathering below dams like walleyes.

Another reason dams are going to

*Another reason dams are going to play an even lesser role in fishing is that good numbers of dams are being removed. And that's not necessarily a bad thing.*

play an even lesser role in fishing is that good numbers of dams are being removed. And that's not necessarily a bad thing.

Dams were built mostly between 1930 and 1970. They were constructed to provide flood control, recreation, and power. It didn't take long for the power generated from dams wasn't as efficient as hoped.

Also, on some rivers, due to siltation above the dam, flood control below that dam wasn't so good. And when the dam altered the natural flow of the river, the watery habitat downstream was also altered and native fish species were negatively impacted. The folks who thought

building dams was a good idea changed their minds. In the past several decades, almost 2,200 dams have been removed from rivers across North America.

The construction and removal of dams is, like many things, controversial. In their day, dams provided some needed services. They also created some social and environmental issues. For this fisherman and many others, the small dams found across the Upper Midwest provided some very nice memories.

Due to the removal of a good number of these dams, we need to find other ways and places to create fishing memories. Fortunately, for most of us, that's not hard to do.

# Pheasants heading towards a century

## Ringneck came to U.S. from China

By Steve Weisman  
Outdoor Editor

In the Hawkeye state, the last weekend in October is definitely A HAPPENING. It's the pheasant opener, and the 2024 season begins a celebration, as it marks the end of the first 100 years — that's one century — of pheasant hunting in the state of Iowa.

To commemorate this, the Iowa DNR and Pheasants Forever are partnering to celebrate Iowa's 100-year tradition of pheasant hunting beginning this fall and running through October of 2025. Here is a little background of this game bird success.

Of course, it is well known that the ringneck pheasant came to the United States from China, and what a success story it has been. According to DNR historians, the first wild birds were released in Oregon's Willamette Valley in 1881. Within a few years, birds were soon transplanted to other states.

As for Iowa, a windstorm in 1901 damaged the rearing pens of William Brenton, a game breeder near Cedar Falls. A total of 2,000 birds literally flew the coop and integrated into the nearby farmland rich with corn, oats and hay fields and pastureland. Over the years, wild pheasant eggs and wild birds were captured and transported to other regions of the state, and the first hunting sea-

son began in 1925 in 13 north central Iowa counties with an estimated 75,000 hunters taking to the field. The season was only a three-day season (Oct 20-22), with a bag limit of three roosters with half day hunting each day.

By 1935, 38 counties in northern Iowa had a pheasant season. Get this: part of the legal bag limit was one hen pheasant.

1936 was an important year with the Iowa State University/Conservation Commission establishing a September/October roadside survey to monitor pheasant populations. This became the forerunner of the modern August Roadside Survey used today.

By 1941, more than half of Iowa was open to hunting. Now get this one...the year was 1943 and pheasant numbers were exploding so much that a spring season was held from March 15-22 in 11 counties with a daily bag limit of six birds with one being a hen.

By 1951, all or parts of 92 counties were now open to pheasant hunting with a 25-day season with a three-rooster daily limit.

In 1962, the Conservation Commission based on research from Iowa State University revamped Sept/Oct pheasant survey into its current form — the annual August Roadside Survey.

### Perfect timing: Pheasant numbers explode

Most certainly, with the farm-



Pheasants erupt from the cover in an early fall morning-something pheasant hunters are always looking for.

Photo by Steve Weisman

ing practices in those days, pheasant numbers soared in the early 1960s to the early 1970s. The highest pheasant harvest of 1.94 million roosters was in 1963. On that year's 30-mile August Roadside Survey, the count numbers were incredible. The top area was north-west Iowa with 135.8 birds per route! North central was second at 110.3 and northeast was 98.5 birds per route.

In 1964, northwest was still excellent but dropped to 96.4 birds per route and north central took the lead with 137.8 birds per route and northeast was next with 109.9.

Things shifted after that and by 1971 the northern areas had dropped significantly and were replaced by the central, east central and southwest had taken over the top numbers.

Iowa was a true destination for both resident and non-resident hunters, and in 1973, hunter numbers peaked at 308,000 hunters with 1.91 million roosters bagged.

Since that time, numbers of birds bagged have dropped and

with it the number of hunters. Most certainly, it's been about habitat shifts and compounded with difficult winter weather issues and abnormally wet springs.

Changes in farming practices have increased crop productivity, but they have also greatly reduced the grassy/weedy fence rows and grassy field edges, along with seed genetics that have pretty much eliminated weeds in the fields themselves.

At the same time, where there are good habitat tracts through state and federal lands, with the efforts of Pheasants Forever, Ducks Unlimited and Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation and county conservation boards, continued CRP and Continuous CRP practices, pheasant numbers remain stable, if not what the numbers were back in the "heyday" of Iowa's pheasant hunting. In 2011, Iowa initiated the Iowa Habitat and Access Program (IHAP) that provides financial incentive payments to private landowners for creating wild-

life habitat and in return, allowing hunters to hunt on their property. That has grown to be over 30,000 acres statewide.

### Not the heyday...but

Now in its 100th year, pheasant hunting in Iowa, though it's not the heyday, continues to be a strong and vibrant sport. People still come back for opener, maybe go to a hometown football game on Friday night, get together to share previous year stories and, perhaps, gather for an early morning breakfast! It truly is still a HAPPENING! In some hunting groups, there are three and four generation family members getting together for another year's hunt!

As we look to the future, we must remember this. If we want this to continue, we must make sure that we do what we can to help our pheasants with their habitat. After all, it still comes down to this...habitat and weather. Get out there and enjoy a little pheasant hunting!



Chestnut-sided warbler, female/immature male



Osprey at Elinor Bedell State Park



Muskrat at Isthmus Park



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Male mallard duck at Center Lake

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