



# OUTDOOR CONNECTION

STORIES, ADVICE, AND INFORMATION FOR OUTDOOR LOVERS

## GET READY!

### Ice fishing just around the corner

By STEVE WEISMAN  
OUTDOOR EDITOR

While late fall fishing and various hunting seasons are taking place across the country, there's something else taking place. Yes, plans for ice fishing have been going on at ice fishing manufacturers and retail outlets since, well, the 2023 ice fishing season came to a close.

We all know how short and frustrating the 2023 ice season was. Across the ice belt, the ice came late, and it left way too early. However, that's in the past, and ice anglers are looking for and hoping for a much longer ice season in 2024-25.

Most certainly, I am an ice fishing fanatic, so I have been watching the new products unveiled online since August. Much of the excitement comes from the dream and anticipation of the next hook-sets.

#### Several ice fishing primers

Wow, has YouTube given us great visuals for different types of fishing, especially ice fishing. You can google a specific presentation and most likely get a how-to video. Pro staffers from across the country offer hands-on visual tips for using equipment and offering tips and tricks. These

presentations have certainly helped us learn more and help us decide what equipment we really need.

Between now and the middle of December, there will be plenty of ice fishing kickoff opportunities. From Minnesota to South Dakota to northern Iowa to Wisconsin to...in other words, wherever you live in the ice belt, there will be ice fishing shows. These are great places to learn about new products, hear from pro staffers to get pointers and just plain talk ice fishing.

The largest of them all is the St. Paul Ice Fishing & Winter Sports Show at the St. Paul RiverCenter on December 6-8. Presented by Clam, there will be more than 190 exhibitors on hand with products and services targeting ice fishing and winter sports enthusiasts.

#### Getting ready

As an ice fisherman for 60+ years, preparing for the new ice season never gets old. I've learned the importance of getting ready plenty early. Yes, I know that 2023 was kind of a bummer. Most years in northwest Iowa, you can figure that safe ice in our shallow lakes and canals and bays of our bigger lakes usually comes around the middle of December. So, that's what I'm hoping for this year.

Turn to ICE, Page 3C



The author with a pair of nice gills taken this past summer on West Okoboji..



The author's son with a good late winter perch on Big Spirit Lake.

## Pheasant hunting: always a learning experience

### Wet conditions are better

By STEVE WEISMAN  
OUTDOOR EDITOR

Pheasant hunting is such a great sport. Every day seems to bring something different. Just when you think you have things figured out, something different pops up. No matter what, though, trust the dogs! Whether it's a retriever or a pointer, trust the nose!

There can be difficult times, however. For instance, pheasant hunting and wind aren't good partners. The wind just seems to make the birds jumpy and wilder, and they often take flight well before you can get close to them. For hunters that can only go on the weekend or during a day off from work, if it's windy, it's windy. You go anyway.

### Fighting dry conditions

Dry conditions make it extremely difficult for the dog to stick on a scent. Often, the dog will get on a scent, be really



Avery certainly enjoyed the wetter conditions that made picking up scent much easier.

Photo by Steve Weisman



The author's favorite way of fixing fresh "brother-in-law" pheasant matched with coleslaw and acorn squash.

Photo by Steve Weisman

birdy and then lose the scent. Who knows how many times, we miss out on getting birds up because of the dry conditions. This year's late October opener was definitely dry. On the parcel of land that we were hunting, the grassy cover was located adjacent to a combined cornfield on its south side. My hunting party had walked quite a way with nothing, when all of a sudden, one rooster got up and my son swung on it and downed it. That spooked about a dozen birds, and they erupted all around. Too many birds getting up all over, and we only got two and lost one. Unfortunately, several were well out of range.

Then on Sunday, we went

Turn to MEMORIES, Page 3C

## The sad story of Turtle Lake can be reversed

### Fundraiser could help restore area

By STEVE WEISMAN  
OUTDOOR EDITOR

When I first moved to Estherville in 1978, one of the obvious draws as an outdoor person was the Iowa Great Lakes. There were so many sloughs, ponds and lakes to explore and to fish. Many of these required boats, but there were a lot of areas to fish from shore.

As I explored West Lake Okoboji, I quickly learned how great a fishery it was, and one of the coolest areas for me was Turtle Lake. Located just east of the Crescent Beach resort, it actually connects to Millers Bay, Emerson Bay, and Spencer Beach via three different small canals. As a lake it's small and was created in the early 1900s as part of a canal system and actually worked as kind of a buffer, a form of sediment retention water body.

When I arrived back in '78, it was one of my go-to fish-from-the-shore. It was only 60 or so years into its existence, so it was still pretty resilient.



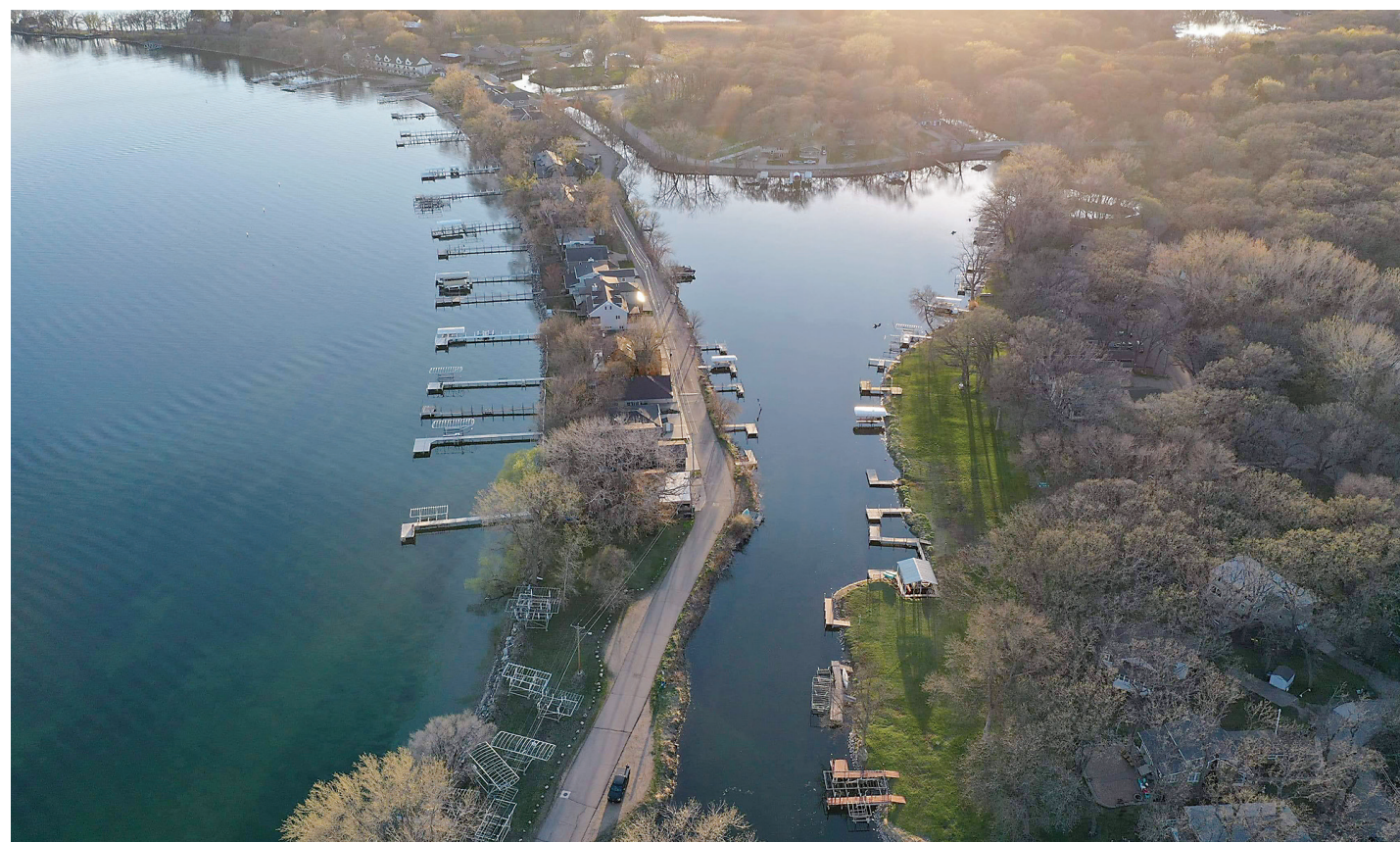
Dredge map shows the acres of Turtle Lake to be dredged.

Photo by Blue View Imagery

Shallow, only about 6-7 feet deep in the middle at that time, the water was clear and warmed quickly in the spring...what a bluegill, crappie and largemouth bass mecca! The myriad of docks only added

to the fish "structure." There is a private side (north) with cabins, and permission is needed to access the docks. However, the west side, south side and east side are open

Turn to TURTLE, Page 3C



Aerial view of Turtle Lake located on the backside (north) of Emerson Bay.

Photo by Blue View Imagery

BRING YOUR CAR TO US TO KEEP YOUR CAR LOOKING ITS BEST!



**M.E.'S**  
BODY SHOP & DETAIL CENTER  
1209 Murray Road, Estherville, IA  
712-362-3950



**Doug Wagner**  
Financial Advisor  
712-362-7744



**Kristia F Pollock**  
Financial Advisor  
712-362-7744

**Edward Jones**

MAKING SENSE OF INVESTING

120 N 7TH ST | ESTHERVILLE, IA 51334 | EDWARDJONES.COM

**PDU Cables**  
connect with us

IF YOU USE THE  
INTERNET, YOU USE  
PDU CABLES.



PDUCABLES.COM

108 S 18TH ST, ESTHERVILLE, IA

It's **ICE** FISHING SEASON



We carry a large selection of ice fishing equipment and supplies.  
Rods, reels, lures and more.  
Live bait available!

**ACE**  
Hardware

409 Central Ave, Estherville, IA • 712-362-3745

# Information about Iowa's public lands

By JOSEPH YARKOSKY  
IOWA DNR CONSERVATION OFFICER

In Iowa, only approximately 3% of the land is available for public use. This makes it extremely important to protect the public land we have. With everyone's help, we can all preserve our public land for future generations to come.

Here in northwest Iowa, we are extremely fortunate to have public land available for use by everyone.

For northwest Iowa, we are quite diverse in this prairie/pothole region. Within this public land, you will find lakes, wetlands, prairie and forest available to many types of uses.

At the same time, there are multiple land managers/owners for this land as well from each level of government. First, you have the State of Iowa which owns/manages Wildlife Management Areas (also called "WMAs") and State Parks and Preserves. Some property is also owned/managed by local County Conservation Boards that includes parks and wildlife areas. We also have land owned by the United States of America and managed by the US Fish and Wildlife. Each property is also signed to show which level of government the land falls under. What is the best way to find public land? The Iowa DNR keeps an up-to-date interactive map showing public land in Iowa. Go to iowadnr.gov, go the "Places to Go", click on "Wildlife Management Area" and then the tab to open the atlas.

## Common questions about public lands

As an Iowa DNR Conservation Officer, a common topic that is brought up and questions that are asked are related to what rules are in place on these public lands. Each level of government has different rules regarding their public land. Many rules on these lands are consistent, but it is the responsibility of the user to reach out to each government entity regarding rules and uses for that specific piece of property.

Since I work for the State of Iowa, here are some common questions that we get asked regarding rules on State of Iowa Wildlife Management Areas (WMA):

## Can I drive motor vehicles/ATVs/Snowmobiles?

No, they are all prohibited on the areas except on constructed and designated roads and parking lots. You can ride a bicycle, including an electric bike less than 750 watts.

## What about taking my dog?

Dogs are prohibited on WMAs between the dates of March 15th and July 15th each year; except that, training of dogs shall be permitted on designated training areas.

## Can I camp on a WMA?

Primitive camping is allowed on all game management areas for a period not to exceed 14 days of consecutive use, unless specific restrictions are posted on site. The department may prohibit or restrict camping at any game management area by the posting of signs stating the applicable restrictions. Where posted, camping shall be prohibited within 100 yards of public parking lots, boat ramps, fishing jetties and other public use facilities.

## When can I hang my tree stand to hunt?

Tree stands used for purposes other than hunting waterfowl may be left on an area for a continuous period of time beginning seven days prior to the open season for hunting deer or turkey and ending seven days after the final day of that open season.

## Can I take mushrooms on WMAs?

Yes, you can take mushrooms (and also asparagus) on WMAs. Citizens collecting nuts/fruits/berries on public property is allowed for personal use unless there is a sign posted saying otherwise. State law prohibits the removal of all other natural materials from state lands and waters unless permitted.

## Addressing littering

Another common violation we see on public land is littering. No person shall place any waste, refuse, litter or foreign substance in any area or receptacle except those provided for that purpose. So, make sure to pick up your trash before you leave.

If you have more questions regarding public land use, please reach out to your local Conservation Officer.

# Iowa's busiest deer season are almost here

DES MOINES — Iowa's most popular deer hunting seasons are just around the corner, when roughly 100,000 hunters take to the timber for the long-awaited gun seasons.

Iowa's first gun season is Dec. 7-11. Second gun season is Dec. 14-22.

Last year, hunters reported around 60,000 deer during these two seasons, which is more than half of the total deer harvested for all seasons, and wildlife experts are forecasting a similar harvest.

So far this fall, youth, disabled hunter, early muzzle-loader and archery hunters have reported more than 25,000 deer through the harvest reporting system, which is about the five-year average.

"We've had a strong harvest in Eastern Iowa, but the declining populations in Western Iowa has impacted hunting opportunity and led to an overall lower harvest," said Jace Elliott, state deer biologist with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR). The 2024 harvest to date is about six percent behind the 2023 harvest.

Archery season got off to a slow start due to summer temperatures extending into early October but harvest has been strong as the calendar turned to November. The long-range forecast calls for above normal temperatures extending into middle December.

"More hunters participate in cooler temperatures," Elliott said. "Cold weather puts deer on their feet and hunters in the woods."

The gun seasons have been traditionally associated with groups of hunters walking through the timber, pushing deer towards other members of the hunting group, but results of the recently completed deer hunter survey found that gun season hunters are divided evenly in how they pursue the deer.

About half participate in traditional deer drives, while the other half prefer to hunt from stationary position. The deer hunter survey found that overall, 80 percent of respondents indicated they are satisfied with the overall deer hunting experience, citing the social aspect of the hunting groups and the opportunity to put deer meat in the freezer as two reasons they hunt.

## Main beam antler measurement

This is the second year the Iowa DNR is requiring hunters to include the main beam antler measurement when reporting their deer.



"Last year, for the first time, we could estimate the percentage of yearling bucks as part of the harvest based on the antler measurement. There was a strong variation across counties in Iowa where some counties had 50 percent of their harvest consisting of yearling bucks, compared to other counties where they were 20 percent," Elliott said.

Statewide, yearling bucks made up 38 percent of the total buck harvest.

## Hemorrhagic disease

Iowa experienced another outbreak of hemorrhagic disease with 93 counties reporting deer mortality. Hemorrhagic disease tends to affect deer in Iowa between late summer and early fall, though outbreak severity can vary from year to year. Hunters and landowners may discover multiple deer carcasses on a property, specifically near a water source, during these months as a result of hemorrhagic disease.

There is no effective treatment or known prevention for wild deer. "Central Iowa has been the most impacted to date, with Guthrie County reporting the highest deer mortality," Elliott said. Western Iowa from Lyon County to Monona County have also reported high deer mortality, along with a few Eastern Iowa counties.

"The disease doesn't impact counties equally, and local deer harvest often lags slightly following outbreaks due to loss of opportunity," he said. "Populations often recover a

few years following the disease, however, in Western Iowa, it may take more time due to an already limited population. As we continue to monitor the effects of this year's outbreak on county deer populations, hunters in some areas may see responsive regulatory changes in the next hunting season. However, hunters should always remember that the decision to pull a trigger is their own and populations are sensitive to doe harvest."

In Western Iowa, the DNR has taken steps to recover the deer herd by reducing or eliminating county specific antlerless only deer licenses, and adding six counties to the list where hunters in the first gun season are limited to bucks only.

"We've had almost 2,000 dead deer reported across the state with nearly 900 entries coming through the new on-line reporting option," Elliott said.

The DNR rolled out a webpage that allowed Iowans to report finding dead deer to provide a better picture of the extent that hemorrhagic disease has impacted the deer in a given year. Go to <https://www.iowadnr.gov/Hunting/Deer-Hunting/Deer-Health> then click on Seasonal Diseases. Identifying hemorrhagic disease is pretty straightforward: mortalities occur between July and September, sometimes later during unseasonably warm weather; more than one deer carcass is found, and carcasses are found near a water source.

# SHOOTING SCTP AFTER HIGH SCHOOL

By STEVE WEISMAN  
OUTDOOR EDITOR

The growth and popularity of the Scholastic Clay Target Program (SCTP) in the state of Iowa continues to grow. Established in Iowa in 2006, SCTP has grown by leaps and bounds to over 4,200 Iowa youngsters in 2024. Iowa's SCTP is a coed sport with the leadership of 500 certified coaches.

Even though athletes compete against other individuals and teams on the range, they also have the chance to turn their efforts in middle school and high school into a potential scholarship from a post-secondary institution.

Colleges and universities across the country have taken up the shooting sports at various levels. The number of collegiate and universities in Iowa who have a shooting sports team has grown from 3 in 2015, to 20 today. These include both community colleges, four-year colleges and universities. While some teams are club-based teams, many are varsity sports, and the team will cover all costs for practice, competition and travel. Others offer a range of financial aid and scholarships. Two of the longest existing institutions include Upper Iowa at Fayette since 2014 and Hawkeye Community College located in Waterloo since 2015.

More than 160 athletes from 13 Iowa colleges competed in the 2023 Iowa Scholastic Clay Target Program (SCTP) Collegiate Championships in Trap, Skeet, Sporting Clays, and Super Sporting Clays on Oct. 21-22, at the New Pioneer Gun Club in Waukegan.

In visiting with Cory Hanson, coach of the Emmet County Clay Busters, he says, "It is amazing just how much this sport has grown and how many high school shooters are getting the opportunity to continue their shooting after high school. Since I started coaching here seven years ago, we have had eight of our shooters go on and compete at the college level."

Past Clay Busters include Aurora Peters, who is currently at South Dakota State University, Right now Clay Buster Jewell Ulrich, who graduated last May, is on a full ride to Central College in Fort Dodge. Hanson sees another three to four of this year's seniors pursuing scholarships in college.

According to Jeff Morrison, Director of Development for the western United States, "There certainly all degrees of support for high school athletes if they want to go on past high school and shoot competitively at the college and university level."

The Scholastic Shooting Sports Foundation (SSSF), the national governing body for the SCTP and SASP offers its own scholarship assistance to graduating seniors with the goal of awarding as many scholarships as possible to deserving athletes. Qualifying seniors must have a 3.0 cumulative grade point average and must have competed in one of the SCTP/SASP state championships, national championships or regional events. Scholarship application deadline is midnight



of April 15. Morrison says, "Last year here in Iowa we were able to award \$500 scholarships to all who applied here in Iowa."

You can learn more about the collegiate programs in Iowa by contacting the teams below.

More information can be found on the National SCTP Website at <https://mysctp.com/college-corner/> where information for a total of 14 states with colleges offering collegiate programs.

## Listed below are the programs in Iowa:

- Coe College Clay Target Team  
Patrick Cory, Head Coach: pcory@coe.edu or 319-270-9845  
<https://kohawkathletics.com/sports/ctt/schedule/2020-21>
- Dordt University Defender Clay Dusters  
Tom Prinsen, Head Coach: tom.prinsen@dordt.edu or 574-377-2206  
<https://www.dordt.edu/news/59215>
- Grand View University Vikings Shooting Sports  
Charlie Mundy, Head Coach: cmundy@grandview.edu or 515-452-7594  
<http://www.gvvikings.com/sport/0/39>
- Hawkeye Community College RedTails Sports Shooting  
Troy Emley, Head Coach: troy.emley@hawkeyecollege.edu or 319-296-2320 ext. 1181  
<https://www.redtailathletics.com/sports/rifle/index>
- Indian Hills Community College Sports Shooting  
Jake Stalzer, Head Coach: jacob.stalzer@indianhills.edu or 641-856-2143  
<https://indianhillsathletics.com/sports/rifle/index>
- Iowa Central Community College Tritons Sport Shooting  
Jessica Gunderson, Head Coach: gunderson@iowacentral.edu or (712)269-6520  
<http://www.ictrifons.com/sports/rifle/index>
- Iowa Lakes Community College Lakers Sports Shooting

- Rick Kalsow, Head Coach: rickkalsow@mchsi.com or 712-330-7775  
<https://www.iowalakesathletics.com/sports/trapskeet/index>
  - Iowa Western Community College Reivers Shotgun Sports  
Derek Pollock, Head Coach: dpollock@iwcc.edu or 712-325-3284  
<https://www.goreivers.com/sports/sportshoot/index>
  - ISU Trap and Skeet Club  
Barry McCroskey, Advisor: barmy@iastate.edu or 515-294-3882  
<https://www.stuorg.iastate.edu/498>
  - Kirkwood Community College  
Darren Zabloudil, Head Coach: Darren.Zabloudil@kirkwood.edu or (563) 320-4129
  - Northeast Iowa Community College Sports Shooting  
Anthony Sisneros, Head Coach: sisnerosan@nicc.edu or 563-313-1136  
<https://www.nicc.edu/sports-shooting/>
  - Northwest Iowa Community College Thunder Sports Shooting  
Brian Lauck, Head Coach: blauck@nwicc.edu or 712-324-5061 ext 110  
<https://nwicc.edu/sports-shooting/>
  - Simpson College Shooting Sports Club  
Dan Martin, Head Coach: daniel.martin@simpson.edu or 309-645-5078  
<https://www.simpsonathletics.com/sports/sportshoot/index>
  - Southeastern Community College Blackhawks Sports Shooting  
Tim Weaver, Head Coach: tweaver@scociowa.edu or 319-208-5111  
<https://www.sccblackhawks.com/sports/rifle/index>
  - Southwestern Community College Spartan Sports Shooting  
Josh Purdy, Head Coach: purdyjoshuac@johndeere.com or 641-745-0099  
<https://www.southwesternspartans.com/sports/sportshoot/index>
  - Upper Iowa University  
Reba Kingsley, head coach: kingsleyr20@uii.edu or 563-425-5991
  - University of Iowa Shooting Sports Club  
Jared Vanspeybroeck; jared-vanspeybroeck@uiowa.edu  
<https://www.facebook.com/UiowaShootingSportsClub/>
  - Waldorf University Warriors Trapshooting Team  
Dean Mueller, Head Coach: Dean.Mueller@waldorf.edu or 641-585-8119  
<http://www.waldorfwarriors.com/sport/0/32.php>
  - Wartburg College  
Wyatt Hamby, head coach: wyatt.hamby@wartburg.edu or 805-400-9005
  - William Penn University  
Steve Heaton, Head Coach: Steve.Heaton@wmpenn.edu or 641-660-3798  
<https://www.statemenathletics.com/sport/0/39>
- For high school athletes in Iowa, it is never too early to begin checking into post secondary opportunities and scholarships.

# Fall DNR night sets record for attendance

By STEVE WEISMAN  
OUTDOOR EDITOR

Whenever something special happens in my life, I often quote the song "Oh, what a night!" made famous by The Four Seasons. It might be a family deal, a victory in a big game or as in the case of Thursday, November 14, it was the annual Fall DNR Night sponsored by the Iowa Great Lakes Fishing Club (IGLFC).

After all, 220+ members (individuals and families) were on hand for the evening's events, beginning with an "all you can eat pizza meal" where over 600 pieces of Godfather's pizza was devoured!

A special tribute went to all veterans in attendance before the DNR programs began. All veterans received a rod and reel combo for their service to the country, compliments of the IGLFC.

The main part of the evening was the series of presentations by the Iowa DNR staff: law enforcement and fisheries biologists.

## Law Enforcement

Captain Greg Harson, head of the northwest Iowa district spoke to the intense late June flooding and the difficulty it caused in so many areas of the Iowa DNR. Then, Joe Yarkosky, Clay County Conservation Officer discussed a variety of law enforcement topics in 2024.

Flooding led to Big Spirit Lake Spillway enforcement activity. With all the water going over the spillway, lots of gamefish made their way into the spillway. According to Yarkosky, nine northwest Iowa conservation officers spent significant hours enforcing fishing laws. Spillway statistics included 58 citations and another 70 written warnings. The most common violations included no fishing license, unlawful means of harvesting fish (snagging/hand fishing), out-of-season musky take/possession, over limit on bluegills.

DNR personnel in all areas dedicated many hours working in communities across northwest Iowa helping serve and protect people from the impact of flooding. Yarkosky also reminded boat owners that boat registrations expire on April 30, 2025, and to get that taken care of before next year's boating season. He also discussed ATV/Snowmobile registrations expiring on December 31. In making things easier for snowmobile owners, the snowmobile user permit has now been merged with the registration. ATV/UTV's cannot be run on state highways (71,18, 9), and non-residents must get a non-resident user permit to operate on public land.

Yarkosky noted that more and more Iowans are downloading/using the "Go Outdoors Iowa App" to purchase and store licenses on their smartphone or tablet. Finally, there is a hiring push for 2025 Water Patrol Officers with many positions located in the Iowa Great Lakes. With a pay of \$16.50 per hour, it is a great entry way to get into the DNR. Application forms can be found on [governmentjobs.com](http://governmentjobs.com).

## Fisheries Update

Mike Hawkins and Jonathan Meerbeek, both fisheries biologists at the Spirit Lake Hatchery, shared a variety of research data. Hawkins spent a lot of time sharing information about the recent release of 1,900 American paddlefish into West Lake Okoboji.

First off, their ancestors first appeared in the fossil record, would you believe, nearly 135 million years ago. The only other paddlefish species in the world, the Chinese paddlefish, was declared extinct in 2010.

According to Hawkins, the American paddlefish is native to the Okoboji lakes, but this fish has been gone from the lakes since about 1919. "They probably disappeared because of fragmentation of the river systems with the dams that were put in place on the Little Sioux River. 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. There are lots of photographs floating around of paddlefish being caught in West Okoboji in the early 1900s.

Restoration efforts have been very successful across the Midwest and here in the Missouri and Mississippi river systems in Iowa. Hawkins says, "Because of the past history of this species in The Iowa Great Lakes it was a natural choice to reintroduce them here." They are a big fish with news articles and pictures from 1916 with two monsters, one at 185 pounds and another caught two weeks after the first weighing an astonishing 210 pounds, both caught on West Okoboji.

Of the 1,900 paddlefish released on October, 25 of the paddlefish were implanted with acoustic tags so that their movements can be studied over the next 1 1/2 years. With 20 listening stations on the bottom of the lake, the stations will log daily and seasonal migration around the lakes and even detect a fish leaving the lakes and going downstream.

Hawkins explained, "We don't know a lot about how well they will survive,



Terry Thomsen, IGLFC president, offered a welcome to all in attendance, recognized the veterans in the crowd and introduced the DNR guest speakers.

Photo by Steve Weisman

and if they will 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. Every six months the hydrophones that are listening for the tags are pulled to the surface and they data downloaded." The hydrophones in the lake are being used for other studies, so the total cost for this tracking study is only for the tags which are about \$260 a piece. Hawkins thanked the club for their assistance. "The tag cost was donated by the IGL Fishing Club and other lake residents. The IGL Fishing Club stepped up to organize these donations and order the tags."

Hawkins also discussed the shallow water lakes that have been restored in northwest Iowa. Unfortunately, several of these water bodies experienced severe flooding during late June, which brought in the undesired carp back into the lakes. Each of these is being assessed and plans are being designed to address the rough fish issues. He also

touched on the three miles of shoreline restoration completed at Silver Lake by Lake Park and also restocking of Diamond and Trumble lakes.

Meerbeek, meanwhile, updated the crowd about the success of the low-dose rotenone treatment on Lake Cornelia for yellow bass. At this point, the results have been positive.

An important muskie tracking study continues. Meerbeek noted that during the late June high water, only one of the tagged muskie went over the Lower Gar overflow. However, one that had gone over the dam previously returned to the Okoboji's during the late June flood! So, one left, while one came back.

The biologists talked about the impact of zebra mussels on local lakes. It appears that the zebra mussels in the Okobojis have reached a plateau, and the population has moderated at much lower level than experienced in previous years. It seems that Mother Nature has adjusted with an explosion of pumpkinseed panfish and freshwater drum that both feast on zebra mussels. However, Spirit Lake is still experiencing a zebra mussel explosion, and the lake environment has not yet adjusted to the invaders. Only time and Mother Nature will provide the answer to that.

At the same time, vegetation growth on Big Spirit continues to be variable and changing, while an uptick in blue-green algae blooms have occurred. Two years ago, the vegetation growth was incredible and lots of anglers complained about it, while in 2024, the vegetation growth was less significant.

Meerbeek concluded his presentation by inviting people to come to the Spirit Lake Hatchery to visit. "Please stop in and tell us what you are seeing and finding. We always welcome anglers and are happy to answer questions and listen to your concerns."

## The big raffle

The end of the evening was the drawing for 40 special fishing raffle items with all proceeds going to working with youth across northwest Iowa in the next year. According to Dean Jacobson, treasurer of the IGLFC, "We had so many sponsors step up and help both sponsor and minimize the cost of these items. We had a total of \$15,000 in sales with over \$5000 in profit. All of this will go to fund our youth projects."

IGLFC president, Terry Thomsen gave a huge shout out to all who attended. "What a great night with the most people in attendance we have ever had for one of our special nights. For 2024, we are now at 350 memberships, and on DNR night we signed up 100 members for 2025!"



Fishing can be as simple or as involved as we want. Fish the way you enjoy fishing.

Photo by Bob Jensen

# TODAY'S COST OF FISHING

By Bob Jensen

FISHING THE MIDWEST FISHING TEAM

My friends and I got together again a few days ago. It seems like when a person becomes a "certain age", a.k.a. "retired", they spend more time getting together with friends or acquaintances who have also achieved "retired" status.

Topics of conversation vary I'm told, but with the group that lets me hang out with them, the talk usually revolves around fishing. In our recent fishing conversation, the topic was "The Cost of Fishing". Some members of our group feel that fishing has got too expensive.

For some anglers, fishing certainly has become more expensive. Fishing poles, reels, lures and line, just like guns and golf clubs are more expensive than they used to be. But compare today's mid-range price rods or reels with mid-range price rods or reels of a couple of decades ago. Today's mid-range rod or reel, just like a gun or golf club, costs more than it used to, but it's also

a much better product. Prices on most things go up. That's the way it is.

Today's angler is much more versatile. We use a lot more techniques for our fishing, and those techniques, much of the time, are best employed with specialized equipment.

Take walleye fishing for example. Jigs and live bait rigs were the primary tools for catching walleyes not so long ago. One or two rod/reel combos were all we thought we needed. Today we have so many more rod/reel options. Although two are probably still enough, most of us want a rod for light jigs, another for heavier jigs. We want a rod for pulling live bait rigs, and another for bottom-bouncing. Most walleye chasers troll, and trolling rods, the ones with line counter reels, are only used for trolling. And you're going to want to get some planer boards so you can cover the water more efficiently. The same thing holds true for bass fishing. Lots of new and different techniques, and each technique is best employed with a technique specific rod.

*Take walleye fishing for example. Jigs and live bait rigs were the primary tools for catching walleyes not so long ago. One or two rod/reel combos were all we thought we needed.*

Acquiring new fishing equipment is part of the fun of fishing. We're always looking for ways to trick a fish into biting our bait. But as our group discussion was winding down, I looked around the room. I realized that one of the anglers didn't catch more fish than me because he had more and better equipment, he caught more fish because he went fishing more often. Another group member also usually catches more fish than me. She catches more fish because she's a better angler.

The group consensus was that although fishing today is more expensive than it used to be, it doesn't need to be so expensive that we don't go fishing.

Catching a few fish is a fun part of fishing, but catching is only part of the fun. The value of spending time by the water with family, friends, or by yourself, can't be measured in dollars. It costs a little more to go fishing these days, but in the long run, fishing is still one of the best deals there is.

*Editor's note: Bob Jensen's 45 year career in the fishing and outdoor industry includes producing and hosting award-winning television and radio shows, co-authoring 5 best-selling books, writing a weekly syndicated outdoor column and numerous feature articles, and presenting fishing seminars at various outdoor events.*

## ICE, Continued from Page 1C

Before the season, though, it's important to go through all the ice fishing gear to make sure everything is ready to go. When the first good ice appears, you don't want to be scrambling haphazardly to get things ready.

### Not all ice is created equal

I repeat: not all ice is created equal! I think we can look back to several instances last winter where ice anglers had to be rescued from unsafe ice. Ice thickness will vary from spot to spot even on the same area of the lake and even from one day to the next and certainly from one lake to another.

Each state across the northern Ice Belt puts out safety guidelines anglers can use when considering ice fishing. According to ice safety experts, stay off ice that is three inches or less in thickness. Four inches of solid, clear ice is the minimum to support one angler. Be careful of fishing alone in case something happens, but a group of anglers should not walk out together on four inches of ice. It's wise to check ice depth as you move out deeper.

At the same time, there are other considerations. Watch out for bridge areas and other current areas, areas where water is entering the lake, shallow rocky areas or weedy areas. It seems every year here in the Iowa Great Lakes, vehicles break through, and thankfully, no one has perished. West Okoboji and Big Spirit Lake are the worst! Both develop seams and heaves, and the ice seems to move, creating other seams and heaves. The thin ice under the bridge between East and West Okoboji seems to be a magnet, and every year somebody foolishly thinks they can make it through. It hasn't happened yet! Other areas, too, have become vehicle traps. My best advice is to check with area bait shops and area guides' websites. They often have critical ice safety updates. Remember, finally, snow on top of the ice slows down the freezing process and you cannot see what's

going on beneath that snowpack.

Before you go out, use common sense, and be prepared. Wear a life vest under your winter gear, or better yet wear one of the new flotation ice fishing suits such as the motion float technology designed by Clam Outdoors in its Ice Armor suits. It's a good idea to carry a pair of ice picks if you do happen to break through. On clear ice, always use a good set of ice cleats to give a good grip as you pull out your shelter and equipment and most importantly to help avoid falls.

At my age, I've found it important to go light as possible when walking on the ice. I still like to have a shelter, so I've gone with the Clam Scout XT Thermal. At less than 50 pounds and with runners to help move the shelter, I can store a bucket with rods and tackle, heater, Vexilar and auger and still be relatively light and portable.

### Early on

Based on the open water fishing this past year for panfish on Big Spirit and West Okoboji, panfishermen should be excited for this winter's action with excellent numbers of crappie, bluegill and perch in both lakes. Historically known for its perch population, for the first time in years, Big Spirit produced lots of 9-10" perch this past summer and well into late October. Most of the action occurred in the shallow water (7-10") in the weeds. At the same time, crappies up to 14" were taken.

For that reason, I'm thinking the shallows in Templar Lagoon, the north Grade and Angler's Bay should hold good fish at early ice.

One of the go-to winter ice fishing destinations is West Okoboji. Known for its gin clear water, West Okoboji is known for its sight fishing opportunities for the excellent numbers of 8-9+ inch bluegills. The bays of West Okoboji ice up a bit later than Big Spirit. However, Little Emerson, Little Millers, Big Emerson,

Big Millers, Smiths Bay and North Bay will all be places to look for the finicky clear water gills.

### Tackle and presentation

First off, you gotta go light! To start the winter off, you'll be in shallow water, so downsize. I go with two-pound test line and small 1/32 to 1/64-ounce tungsten jigs like the Clam Drop or Dingle Drop.

It's important in this shallow water that the jig doesn't spin, so instead of using a spinning reel, I choose to go with the fly fishing style ice reel, so the line spools straight off the reel and doesn't twist. Nothing stops a fish from biting more quickly than a spinning lure from a twisting line.

Matching this with an ultralight rod sensitive enough to detect the lightest bite or using a spring bobber is extremely important. Bites can be a heavy "thunk" or the most subtle little movement of the line.

Tipping these jigs with the right bait can make a huge difference. Traditionally, I will use a silver wiggler or a wax worm, but over the past couple of winters I have gone to using more plastics. The Maki plastics have been good, and now there is the new Niku plastics that should work great for panfish. The key to these plastics on the Iowa Great Lakes is to pick a smaller, thin bait that you can thread on the hook with the end sticking straight out the back of the hook, causing a pulsing shimmer when you jiggle the jig.

As the winter goes, the fish will be more spread out and in deeper water, often relating to the deeper weed edges. The perch, of course, will be more nomadic with the big schools on the move. Sometimes they will stick in an area, but often they continue to move through in search of food.

So, yes, fall is still here, and open water fishing and hunting seasons are going strong, but watch for it... ice fishing is right on the horizon!

# Essential autumn tree care tips

DES MOINES — The Iowa DNR's tree experts share tips for working in your yard or timber areas.

Late fall to winter is a great time to prune trees. Insect and pathogens are in dormant stages with colder weather. When trees start to grow next spring they will start to produce wound tissue to cover the cuts, reducing the chance of insect and disease problems. Leaves are gone off the trees making structural pruning much easier.

Without the leaves on, it is easier to see co-dominant leaders, crossing or rubbing branches, and branches with poor branch angles. Branches on trees in your yard should be removed before they are much thicker than your thumb. Try not to remove more than a quarter of the crown.

Water your trees deeply and less frequently to encourage deep root growth and make them more resilient. Water during the early morning to minimize evaporation and freezing. It gives your trees more time to drink up. Invasive bush honeysuckle and buck-thorn trees are easy to spot through the woods in the fall. Their leaves remain green late into the season after everything else has fallen off, and often remain attached as late as

All trees are grown from Iowa seed sources to harvest the bounty of native genetics that have thrived in our soils and weather against disease, insects, droughts and floods for many thousands of years.

Visit the DNR online store to view seedling varieties and to place your spring order. DNR's expert nursery staff can assist with species selection and answer questions about your tree needs and nursery offerings.

Thanksgiving. Pesticides applied to cut surfaces work best this time of year as sap is being translocated to the roots.

### Start planning for spring tree plantings

Late fall is a good time to prepare for next spring. Here's some tips and resources.

Grants are available to help communities and schools become greener, shadier, and healthier places to work, live and play. Check out the links below for grant requirement and how to apply.

IRA Tree Planting Grant - applications due by 4:00 p.m. on Monday, December 30, 2024.

Community Forest Program (CFP) - application due Jan. 13, 2025.

Additional grants will be available in December. Check the Urban Forestry webpage for grant requirement and how to apply.

Private forest landowners can apply for technical and financial assistance through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). The first application cutoff date for new EQIP contracts is Nov. 22, 2024.

Contact your district forester to set up a time to visit your timber and help you develop a management plan.

Find tips for selecting, planting and proper maintenance of trees on the DNR Tree Resources and Links webpage.

The Iowa DNR State Forest Nursery offers spring delivery in April and May for hardwood, conifer and shrub seedlings.

## PHEASANT, Continued from Page 1C

through the same area, and as I walked on a path next to the stand of big bluestem, a rooster ran ahead of me for about 20 yards and then veered into the cover. I had my son and grandson walk that area and nothing. The two labs didn't even get birdy. The dry conditions seemed to have won over again.

At the end of the patch of bluestem, the cover turned to reed canary grass. Curt's lab, Avery grew birdy, so he followed her into the grass. Then she went on point, would you believe, right between Curt's legs! Curt could see nothing, but Avery remained locked up on point. He reached down and spread out the mass of grass and nothing.

Still, she remained on point. So, he reached down through the matted grass and way down, he felt something and grabbed, you guessed it, a rooster pheasant. To top it off, it was the rooster that had been winged the day before. Without a good dog, Curt would have walked right on by.

We should have known we would have trouble, when a group of 10-12 pheasants erupted from a bean field and just about flew into Curt's pickup on the way down to hunt.

That should have been a hint at what might happen. We arrived at the area and planned to walk the low land and slough area and then come back on the higher sidehill. Unfortunately, that wasn't what the pheasants had in mind. As we headed out, one pheasant erupted on the sidehill and then...the entire sidehill erupted with escaping pheasants. I would guess at least 50 flew across the road to a private CRP field.

Long story short...we only bagged two roosters and flushed a few hens. I'm not sure if the boys would have come in from the other side and pushed toward me at the end of the sidehill? Most likely they probably would have broken early, and they do have a way of avoiding blockers.

### Favorite pheasant recipe

Our entire family enjoys eating pheasant. Years ago, my wife and I saw a recipe called "brother-in-law pheasant" that Bill Hall from Algona had placed in a publication, and it has become our favorite recipe. Give it a try; we think you'll like it. Here it is:

*Take pheasant breasts and cut into 1/2" strips. Dredge the strips in a bowl of beaten eggs. Place strips into a bag of crushed crackers. Place breaded strips in skillet and fry. Once all strips have been cooked, place several pieces on a plate and pour a mix of melted butter, lemon juice and Worcestershire sauce over the strips.*

*We then pair the pheasant with coleslaw, slices of banana and coleslaw dressing, along with baked acorn squash (with brown sugar in the center). Oh my, what a combination!*

## TURTLE, Continued from Page 1C

to the public.

As soon as the ice went out, we began to check for the bluegills to arrive. From April through May, it was so awesome. Of course, the bass anglers would work Turtle Lake pitching their baits up shallow around the docks. Then in June, I'd take a boat in and anchor out in the deeper water and still catch nice gills!

When my son, Curt was only five years old, he started tagging along on the docks on the south side (with his life jacket on-which he didn't much appreciate!) Then my grandson, Hunter began tagging along at about the same age. I can't count how many friends and their children I took there. On the surface, things appeared to be good.

At the same time, Turtle Lake was a great place for canoeing and kayaking. It was a great area for wildlife watching.

### HOWEVER...

Slowly, ever so slowly things began to change, and Turtle Lake began to struggle. Sediment began to build up, and depth began to change (for the worse). Vegetation, which once drew the fish, began to choke the lake. Soon, the clear water became green, and when you cast a bobber and bait or a bass lure, it'd come back with green slime all over it.

The really nice fish began to "not" frequent Turtle Lake, and the sediment kept building

to the point that it is now difficult to even get a boat through the lake. For the past 4-5 years, my son, grandson and I will always check it out in early spring (hoping for a return of the old days), but we always leave disappointed.

BUT...there appears to be a chance that "we could turn the switch" and take things back...with the chance to make Turtle Lake what it was for so many decades.

### The chance to turn the switch

A group of concerned citizens, conservationists and lake homeowners have come together to form the Save the Turtle Lake Committee to raise funds for dredging the lake and a portion of the canals to "turn the switch" and preserve this beautiful wetland area. The committee has begun their media blitz, and they approached me about helping spread the word.

All have come at a price. However, this group has great determination to see this happen and has already gotten pledges for a little more

than \$350,000 of the needed \$750,000, which is a great start!

If the fundraising goal is reached by the end of December, the committee can secure dredging equipment with the plan to begin work in the fall of 2025. All contributions are tax-deductible, and pledges will only be collected if the total financial commitment is met.

### How to help

People interested in seeing this renovation happen can become part of the solution by sending pledges via email to Save.Turtle.Lake@gmail.com by December 20, 2024.

Please include your full name, address, phone number, and pledge amount. Donations will be collected in late December or early January, depending on the donor's preferred tax year for the contribution.

For more information or to get involved, contact Tim Ireland at 712-229-1450 or Save.Turtle.Lake@gmail.com.

Here is a statement from the Save the Turtle Lake Committee. "Preserving Turtle Lake is about more than maintaining a waterway - it's about safeguarding a natural resource for future generations," according to Tim Ireland. "We're asking the community to unite and help us reach our goal to ensure this project moves forward."

# Outdoor Connection



Buck in back yard

**THE**  
*end of*  
**AUTUMN**

*photos by*  
**MIKE**  
**FREDRICKSON**

Call or text Mike to purchase photos  
**712-209-4907**



Buck in back yard



Juvenile bald eagle north of Estherville



Male mallard duck at Center Lake



Turkey in back yard

**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

**THATE'S TREE SERVICE** Proudly Serving Southern Minnesota & Northern Iowa. Thank You for Allowing Us to Serve You Since 1977!

**Complete Professional Tree Care for:**

- Commercial •Residential &
- Agricultural Properties

**CERTIFIED ARBORIST**  
**ISA**  
Joe Thate  
MN-4410A

**We offer Tree Risk Evaluations by an ISA Certified Arborist.**

**We Specialize in Large & Difficult Tree Projects!**



**Have an "Impossible" Job? CALL US TODAY!**

Our ISA Certified Arborists and a complete line of equipment can service all your tree needs.

**THATE'S TREE SERVICE**

John Thate - Owner  
**800.225.8733**  
www.thatetree.com • Fully Insured

**24 Hour Emergency Service!**

**FREE ESTIMATES!**