



# OUTDOOR CONNECTION

STORIES, ADVICE, AND INFORMATION FOR OUTDOOR LOVERS



The snow trillium, often found in moist undisturbed wood-slopes, is one of Iowa's earliest blooming plants.

Photo by Sidney Krueger

## Looking for the beauty in nature

Life is starting to appear all around us as we head into warmer, longer days and beautifully clear nights. Trees are budding, spring ephemerals are blooming, and birds can be heard singing throughout the day. Reports of garter snakes have reached my ears, which is an open invitation for a snake enthusiast like myself to turn over any rocks or logs I think may be hiding some of my legless friends. No personal snake findings can be reported at this time.

The DNR's Weekly Woodland Wildflower Report has kept me busy keeping an eye out for new flowers blooming in our county's natural areas. I've spotted snow trillium, hepatica, and bloodroot in bloom, lots of wild leek, Virginia waterleaf, and white fawn lily emerging, and the ever-persistent, invasive garlic mustard also making an appearance.

Over three days, I ushered five 1st grade classes around the Whitetail Ridge Interpretive Trail in Fort Defiance State Park. As the kids, teachers and I walked, we used our five senses to discover and experience things around us. We invited the bright sun to warm our faces, felt a soft carpet of moss, smelled the pungent perfume of wild leek, heard birds calling and saw the creek running in the valley below us.

The kids and I kept an eye out for litter as we walked along. The kids were so good at spotting trash that we filled a plastic grocery bag each time we went out.

Before we started our walk, I explained how important it was to leave our natural spaces better than how we found them, which included picking up any trash we found along the way.

To say the kids were enthusiastic about pointing out litter to me is an understatement. I'm thankful for the time we spent outside together, their

open minds, and their little litter-spotting eyes. Emmet County Conservation Director, Matt, and I have kept ourselves busy around the Nature



**Sidney Krueger**  
Emmet County Naturalist

Center as we've prepared to launch a new website and get a seasonal naturalist hired. Our seasonal park technicians have returned to the campgrounds, which are now officially open for the season.

It's thanks to their hard work getting the campgrounds cleaned up and ready to host that we are on track for the busy summertime. We expect, like many other places in town, to have a busy week when RAGBRAI rides through. The Ellsworth Go-Getters joined us one Saturday morning to help clean up the Nature Center yard.

The Go-Getters raked leaves, picked up sticks and helped us clean up our flower beds in preparation for spring and summer programming. They made quick work of the clean-up day and got to meet some of our animal ambassadors as a treat for visiting.

As we settle into spring, be deliberate about taking a moment to go outside and be present. Go sit with your face in the sun. Ponder the plants rising from the ground and the buds emerging from the trees. Listen for the birds and the frogs singing. Let the wind mess up your hair a little. Let's rediscover how wonderful it is to have nature at our fingertips as we navigate a world that's becoming increasingly industrial. And let's not take anything for granted!

## WEST SWAN RESTORATION MOVES TOWARD COMPLETION



The drone used for the chemical application on West Swan.

Photo provided by Iowa DNR

### Good spring rains will help finish the project

By STEVE WEISMAN  
OUTDOOR EDITOR

Since 2006, the Iowa DNR has gone about restoring lakes across the state through the Lake Restoration Program. Created by the Iowa Legislature, the goal of the program is to increase the health and safety of Iowa's lakes, involve local communities in restoration projects and remove bodies of water from the state's Impaired Waters list. Some of the lakes restored in Iowa have been the shallow natural lakes we find northwest and north central Iowa. The cool thing is when the restoration is completed, it's almost like turning a switch.

At one time these natural lakes were all healthy and vibrant ecosystems that unfortunately have become degraded to the point of little use. Often devoid of plant life with very poor water quality and overrun by fish such as carp and bullheads, these former gems are often ignored and forgotten. They simply cannot handle the runoff and increased nutrients and sed-

iments that accompany this runoff. Left alone, these lakes cannot recover and simply will stay in their poor state. Common carp add to this situation and can keep the lake in poor condition even after other changes are made. This is where this program is so important.

One of the most recent shallow lake restoration projects in northwest Iowa has been taking place at West Swan Lake located south of Gruver. However, it has taken longer than originally planned because of its size, complexity, and string of extreme weather events. This has been an extended battle.

According to Iowa DNR Fisheries Biologist, Mike Hawkins, "This has been a long project." The first attempt was with a drawdown of the lake with the goal of having winter take care of the common carp. This normally works well with the harsh cold of Iowa winters. However, Mother Nature did not cooperate, and the mild temperatures allowed the rough fish to survive. So, an under the ice application

of rotenone, a chemical that targets only fish, was completed. We then experienced the warmest winter in Iowa's history helping some of the carp survive again! So, things were delayed until the fall of 2024.

#### Third time the charm

According to Hawkins, "After that unsuccessful attempt, we decided try one more time and do a rotenone open water fall application after we had gotten water levels down as far as we could."

However, with the lake drawn down, it was impossible to use boats to apply the product to the water, and so a different technique was used. According to Mark Flammang, Iowa DNR Fisheries Biologist, "We took the opportunity to use an agricultural drone, something that to our knowledge hasn't been used to this point for this type of application."

Following the application, the results were excellent with a complete kill of the rough fish. The boards were put back into

Turn to LAKE, Page 3C



Kim Hawkins, Spirit Lake Hatchery manager, stands in front of the adult muskies as she visits with a Hatchery visitor.

Photo by Steve Weisman

## 2025 gill netting completed in two nights

By STEVE WEISMAN  
OUTDOOR EDITOR

Prior to each year's gill netting, both of Iowa's hatcheries, Spirit Lake and Lake Rathbun receive fry stocking requests from across the state. This helps each hatchery manager determine the number of walleyes that need to be brought to the hatchery. For example, the 2025 fry request is 51 million walleye fry, which means about 615 quarts of eggs. This means netting about 650-700 ripe females and 250 males for fertilizing the eggs.

#### The walleye gill netting begins: game on

With that in mind, it was a matter of getting the temperatures right. Finally, on Wednesday (April 9), it was go-time with three crews setting their first gill nets of the season on Big Spirit Lake and one crew working the north end of East Okoboji. The temperatures were right, and the walleyes were staging. Would you believe a total of 454 male walleyes were brought in from Big Spirit, while another 11 males came from East Okoboji!

At the same time, 400 females came from Big Spirit, along with 26 females netted on East Okoboji. Of these females, 163 were green, 234 were ripe and 29 were spent.

According to Kim Hawkins, Spirit Lake Hatchery manager, "The first night was exceptional. Even though water temperatures kept hanging in the 42-43-degree range, we found a lot of the females ripe and then let the green females rest and recover for a day. Many of them ripened, while the rest were injected to move the process along."

Turn to NETTING, Page 3C

## Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation and Arnolds Park working to protect property

ARNOLDS PARK — Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation purchased an option to buy a 73-acre property in Arnolds Park sandwiched between Upper Gar, Minnewashta and Lower Gar lakes.

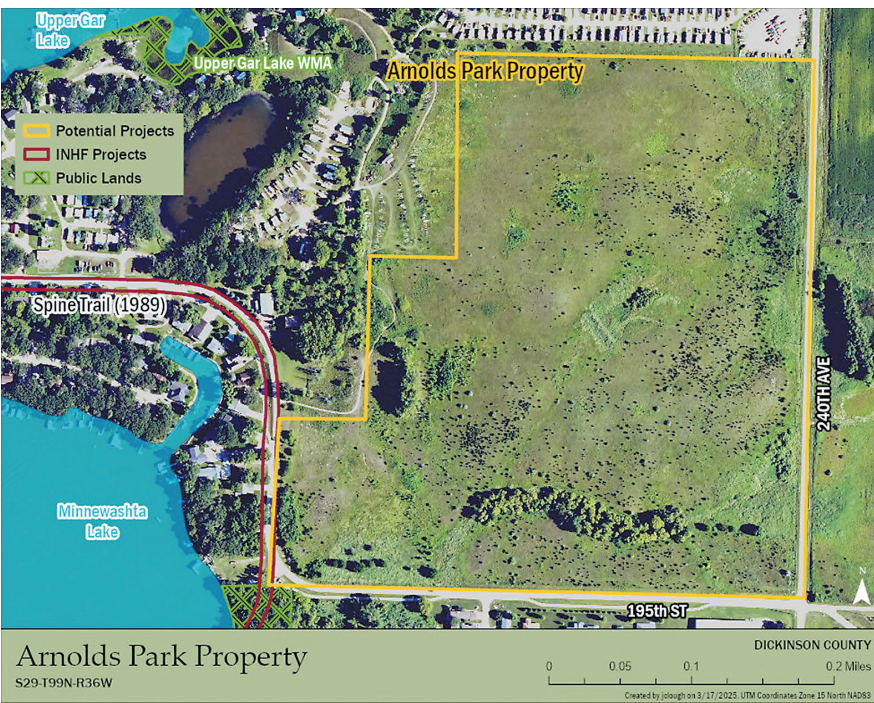
INHF is working with the City of Arnold's Park and Dickinson County Conservation to realize a vision of a city-owned space, open to the public, with management work done by the county.

INHF purchased the non-refundable \$100,000 option with the help \$25,000 from the city of Arnolds Park and contributions from private donors. INHF needs to raise the remaining \$1.9 million of the \$2 million project by October 31, 2025, to successfully exercise the option. While fundraising, INHF will continue to work with partners from the city and county to develop the future vision.

"This is a short time to raise \$2 million, but we know that people in the Lakes community care deeply about water quality and will rally to help protect this important place," said Abby Hade Terpstra, director of philanthropy for INHF. A recent zoning change made the site eligible for development.

Roughly 240 acres drain through the property, making this a key location for restoring wetlands and prairie to aid with cleaning water flowing into Lower Gar and Milford Creek. This is also a key location for a possible trail connection and trailhead as well as a valued open space in a community that is feeling pressure from RV park development.

For more information or to donate, contact Abby Hade Terpstra, director of philanthropy, at [aterpstra@inhf.org](mailto:aterpstra@inhf.org) or at 515-288-1846, ext. 15.



INHF is working with the City of Arnold's Park and Dickinson County Conservation to realize a vision of a city-owned space, open to the public, with management work done by the county.

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

**M.E.'S**  
BODY SHOP & DETAIL CENTER

2209 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](http://EDWARDJONES.COM)

**PDU Cables**  
connect with us

**IF YOU USE THE INTERNET, YOU USE PDU CABLES.**

[PDOCABLES.COM](http://PDOCABLES.COM) 108 S 18TH ST, ESTHERVILLE, IA

**NUCANOE**  
THE ULTIMATE HUNTING & FISHING PLATFORM

Rock solid stable & completely customizable, with a wide open deck that is full of potential. Rigged up or stripped down; fishing or hunting; solo or tandem; paddle, pedal or power. The possibilities are endless!

**FRONTIER 12** **FICK'S ACE Hardware**

See our in-store stock today!



## OUTDOOR CONNECTION

# Well designed actively managed CRP benefits pheasants and more

DES MOINES - Smoke plumes on the horizon is evidence that its peak season for annual prescribed fire across the state. Prescribed fire is the most cost-effective way to manage land enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), providing ecological benefits to native plantings which in turn, benefit wildlife, and in particular, pheasants.

“Managing CRP is important in order to maintain quality habitat for pheasants, namely the brood rearing and nesting cover it provides,” said Todd Bogenschutz, upland wildlife biologist for the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR). “And ideally that will take place before May 1, when we get into nesting season, but if that’s not possible, then hopefully the burn plan will leave some habitat to allow pheasants to relocate.”

Disking or disking and inter seeding are also management options, but neither are as fast or cost effective as fire.

To maximize benefits, the CRP field should incorporate a portion of the area dedicated to winter cover, like switchgrass and or shelterbelts, in addition to a well-placed food plot. Shelterbelts are a mix of shrubs and conifers – preferably four rows of each that provide an escape during harsh winters, where the birds can loaf and have thermal cover, away from predators and out of the weather.

“Research by Iowa State shows that eight rows of shrubs and conifers can stand up to the worst Iowa winter. As far as the species of shrubs, pheasants care more about the shrub structure than the species, but we encourage natives, like wild plums or ninebark or dogwoods,” he said. “The shrubby plants should be less than 15 feet tall, to avoid being a raptor perch.”

The Iowa DNR’s State Forest Nursery in Ames has a selection of native conifers and shrubs available for order online at <https://www.iowadnr.gov/programs-services/forestry-resources/state-forest-nursery>.

“Ideally, the food plots would be located adjacent to the shelterbelt – think of it like putting the kitchen next to the bedroom. Pheasants can move to and from the food plot with minimal exposure,” he said. “Pheasants Forever has food plot mixes that work well. It’s also hard to beat corn. We see a lot of sorghum and soybeans as food plots – songbirds will use the sorghum, but not the soybeans, but the beans are not as tall as corn and can get buried in heavy snow.”

Food plots should be a minimum of two acres for pheasants. If deer are involved, it should be five to 10 acres, he said. Food plots can go fallow and come up in weeds for a year and will still offer the food component and habitat benefits.

“The layout works better if shelterbelts and food plots are not next to woody timber – but away from it, on the open side of the field,” Bogenschutz said.

Iowa has enjoyed a string of mild winters, which can really make the pheasant population jump, especially when followed by a warm dry spring nesting season.

“We don’t really know when the bad winters are coming, but need to be prepared. We have to keep the hens alive through the bad winters, because dead hens don’t nest in the spring,” he said. “The twelve inches of rain we received last spring is hard to manage for, but we can put the quality habitat on the landscape and hope for the best.”

Quality CRP benefits other species as well, like songbirds and pollinators, and snakes and salamanders, if water is nearby. In north central Iowa, deer will use CRP to bed down. It also serves as nesting sites for ducks and Canada geese, and can help to improve water quality by reducing runoff and erosion.

“Our primary ecosystem was prairie, and CRP will benefit our native wildlife species,” he said.

Information on CRP and how to manage it is available from the Iowa DNR’s Wildlife staff and private lands staff, USDA – Farm Service Agency, Pheasants Forever and USDA Service Centers, or online at [www.iowadnr.gov/programs-services/wildlife-land-owner-assistance/conservation-reserve-program](http://www.iowadnr.gov/programs-services/wildlife-land-owner-assistance/conservation-reserve-program).

## Stay safe paddling this spring

DES MOINES - Early spring paddling can provide solitude, exercise and an opportunity to see amazing wildlife. Extra precautions are needed to stay safe with unpredictable spring weather and fluctuating temperatures and river levels.

After heavy rains, water levels can rise quickly and produce strong and fast current. Stay away from strainers and sweepers – wood or branch piles – deadly hazards that can pull a paddler under or pin them underwater. These are usually found on outside river bends where currents are strongest. Review these simple safety tips before you head out on the water.

- Check your canoe or kayak for any needed repairs or maintenance after being stored for several months. Look for holes and leaks and make sure all hatch lids fit snug and securely. Check your paddle blades for signs of cracking or splitting.
- Wear a life jacket at all times while on the water, regardless of your swimming ability. Inspect your life jacket to make sure all buckles and zippers work properly. Replace the life jacket if it has damage that cannot be repaired.
- Dress for the water temperature, not the air temperature. Air temperatures may feel warm in early spring, but the water is still dangerously cold. Wear a wetsuit or dry suit, along with layers, to help avoid hypothermia or cold water shock. Do not wear cotton clothing – it fails to insulate when wet. Choose synthetics or wool.

Dress in layers so you can peel a layer off if overheated.

- Always bring along a dry bag with a complete set of extra clothes you can change into if you get wet, a first-aid kit and a protected cell phone or weather radio. Get out of wet, cold clothing as soon as possible. Pack plenty of water to stay hydrated.
- Let a friend or loved one know where you are going and when you are expected to return. It will be easier to find you if you need help.

Get tips for planning a fun and safe paddling trip on the DNR webpage at [www.iowadnr.gov/playyourtrip](http://www.iowadnr.gov/playyourtrip).

## Get your boat ready for open water

DES MOINES — The Iowa DNR offers these tips for a trouble free boating season. It is time to get your boat ready for spring. Here are some tips to ensure your boat is safe and running smoothly when boating weather arrives.

1. Inspect your boat and trailer - Start at one end and check the entire boat. What is the general condition? Check the trailer tires and vehicle-to-trailer electrical connections, and inspect the winch, winch cable, and tie-downs.
2. Safety first - Are the life jackets in good shape and do they still fit everyone? Visually inspect each lifejacket looking for rips or tears and make sure all straps and buckles work properly and are not frayed. How old is the fire extinguisher?
3. Inspect for minor repairs - Put in boat plug, attach hoses that were removed, and check for loose connections. Be sure to check for any cracks in hoses. If they are starting to become brittle, replace them before refilling anything.
4. Check Electronics and Batteries - Inspect electrical connections to be sure they are clean, tight and corrosion-free. Charge and test your battery to be certain that it will hold a charge using a voltmeter. Clean the battery terminals with a wire brush if needed.

The Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) encourages all boaters to enroll in a boating education course this spring. Traditional and online courses are available. Courses are made to fit every schedule and lifestyle. Find information about course options online at [www.iowadnr.gov/things-do/boating/education-safety](http://www.iowadnr.gov/things-do/boating/education-safety).

## KABELE’S TRADING POST AND LODGE:

# PASSING THE TORCH TO CARRY ON THE LEGACY

By STEVE WEISMAN  
OUTDOOR EDITOR

Kabele’s Trading Post, located at 504 Hill Avenue across the road from East Lake Okoboji and just a mile south of Big Spirit Lake, has been a family run business ever since Ed and Alice Kabele opened the doors in 1968. Then 36 years later Thane Johnson took over and was joined by his wife, Tanya in 2010. The business has continued to grow, and the “mom and pop shop” expanded, and an eight-room lodge was established in 2007 changing the name to Kabele’s Trading Post and Lodge.

With Thane and Tanya’s vision of growth and working with their employees to offer customers the best service possible, Kabele’s Trading Post and Lodge has continued its growth to become a true go-to destination for locals and visitors alike.

Now in the spring of 2025, Kabele’s Trading Post and Lodge is changing hands for only the third time in 57 years! Nick Klatt and his fiancé Tessa are the new owners, continuing to make Kabele’s Trading Post and Lodge a family run business.

Nick and Tessa officially took over the business on April 1. Nick says, “We are super excited about this new adventure, and we are very thankful for the support we have received from Thane and Tanya. We want to keep all the things that they have done so well over the years and build on their legacy.” To help the transition go smoothly, Thane and Tanya have entered in a year-long contract. Thane says, “Our goal is to act as mentors and help Nick and Tessa learn the ins and out of the business. Over the past 21 years, Tanya and I established a logo and built a brand that we are proud of.”

### Over a hairstyling appointment

Tessa, who owns the Hair Team, says with a smile, “This all began several months ago, when I was styling Tanya’s hair. We were visiting during an appointment, and we got to talking about our businesses. The longer we talked, we began to ask, ‘Have you ever? What would you? What do you think?’ With each visit, we’d talk more and more.”

Nick, who has owned Blue Water Guide Service since 2019, reflects, “As a guide, I had become a regular customer at Kabele’s, and as we talked, I began to think more and more about the bait shop. For me, I really wanted to take things beyond just a 9 to 5 job. I could see the guide service being the perfect fit at Kabele’s.”

The timing was perfect for Thane and Tanya. “We loved our business and all our customers, but this is truly a 24-7. Over these years, we had dedicated our entire lives to making memories with all our customers...but it was time!”

### When opportunity knocks

Over the past several months, the two couples spent a lot of time talking and as Tanya says, “We saw a lot of us in them. It’s kind of funny now, but we had been keeping an eye on both of them.”

Over the course of several months, the visiting became more serious and pretty soon the four of them were talking about perhaps a change in ownership. As Thane says, “We found a couple that we thought could emulate us and continue this legacy. When opportunity knocks...”

Opportunity knocked and Nick and Tessa took the leap! On April 1, the deal was completed! Thane and Tanya have so many mixed emotions from excited to a sense of sadness. Tanya says, “We would like to express our sincere appreciation for the loyalty and support of our customers over these past 21 years. This is a decision that we did not take lightly. As

want to live, work and explore in Iowa.

Pheasants Forever and Quail Forever (PF & QF) are honored to receive the Iowa Agriculture Leader Award for Leadership in Conservation from the Iowa Department of Agriculture & Land Stewardship. This recognition is given annually to organizations who are committed to protecting Iowa’s land, wildlife and water for future generations.

The award was presented alongside several others during the 13th annual Iowa Ag Leaders Dinner, and was accepted by PF & QF’s Iowa state coordinator, Joshua Divan. Brooke Rollins, U.S. Secretary of Agriculture, was the featured speaker for Monday evening’s program.

“We’re grateful to be recognized for our team’s work in helping Iowa’s farmers, ranchers, and farmland owners meet their conservation goals,” Divan said. “Protecting the soil, water and wildlife resources on Iowa’s private lands with voluntary conservation practices is not only important to today’s farmers, it’s also critically important to our state economy, our rural communities and future generations who



Alice and Ed Kabele, original owners of Kabele’s Trading Post, stand in front of their bait shop in 1968.



Changing of the guard: Thane, Tanya, Tessa and Nick.

we transition, we are confident that Nick and Tessa will continue to carry on the legacy so important to us and the community. Element 74 will remain under our ownership and will continue to expand. Thane and I look forward to enjoying our life more and making our own future memories.”

### Keeping, yet expanding the brand

Nick adds, “This transition will bring a ton of flexibility for our customers as we will now have a landing spot for the guiding portion of our business, the Blue Water Guide Service, and, of course, we welcome all area guide services to frequent Kabele’s Trading Post and Lodge. Tessa and I will continue to utilize all



Nick and Tessa continue to market Kabele’s seasoning.

the amenities that Kabele’s Trading Post and Lodge is so famous for.” Most certainly that includes the tremendous social media efforts to reach anglers from all over.

At the same time, Nick and Tessa will be working even more to expand product lines to include reaching out to the tech savvy anglers and the younger generation of anglers.

So, the legacy of Kabele’s Trading Post and Lodge continues: Ed and Alice Kabele, 1968-2004; Thane and Tanya Johnson, 2004-2025; Nick Klatt and his fiancé Tessa, 2025...and beyond!

An incredible 57-year history with more to come! Congratulations to Thane and Tanya and welcome to Nick and Tessa!

## Pheasants Forever & Quail Forever receives Iowa Agriculture Leader Award for Leadership Conservation

DES MOINES — Pheasants Forever (PF) and Quail Forever (QF) are honored to receive the Iowa Agriculture Leader Award for Leadership in Conservation from the Iowa Department of Agriculture & Land Stewardship. This recognition is given annually to organizations who are committed to protecting Iowa’s land, wildlife and water for future generations.

The award was presented alongside several others during the 13th annual Iowa Ag Leaders Dinner, and was accepted by PF & QF’s Iowa state coordinator, Joshua Divan. Brooke Rollins, U.S. Secretary of Agriculture, was the featured speaker for Monday evening’s program.

“We’re grateful to be recognized for our team’s work in helping Iowa’s farmers, ranchers, and farmland owners meet their conservation goals,” Divan said. “Protecting the soil, water and wildlife resources on Iowa’s private lands with voluntary conservation practices is not only important to today’s farmers, it’s also critically important to our state economy, our rural communities and future generations who

want to live, work and explore in Iowa.

Pheasants Forever and Quail Forever have been dedicated to working with numerous landowners, partners and agencies to conserve upland habitat on public and private lands since 1982. These efforts improve habitat for many wildlife species such as pheasants and quail, support rural economies and businesses, and increase hunting opportunities for sportsmen and women. Through a strong partnership with the Iowa Department of Agriculture & Land Stewardship (IDALS), the Natural Resources and Conservation Service (NRCS), the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (IDNR), and other local support, PF & QF drastically increased its work with farmers and landowners in Iowa starting in 2009.

“Every year, hundreds of Iowans from every corner of the state gather for the Ag Leaders Dinner to recognize outstanding contributions made by businesses, organizations, and individuals,” said Iowa’s Secretary of Agriculture, Mike Naig. “This year’s awardees, Iowa



Front row (left to right): Stephanie Nelson, Clarissa Bruns, Allie Barth, Josh Divan, Brynn Hogue; back row (left to right): Nick Thompson, Cole Anderson, Mike Naig (Iowa Secretary of Agriculture), Eran Sandquist, Dan Borchardt, Jack Wahl

Photo submitted

Pork Producers Association, Nationwide Agribusiness, Pheasants Forever, and the Iowa Association for Agricultural Advancement, have all made significant pos-

itive impacts to the ongoing success of Iowa agriculture and our rural communities. These awardees play an integral role in developing young leaders and ensuring that Iowa

remains an agricultural productivity powerhouse that drives our economy forward.”

In 2024 alone, PF & QF team members delivered almost 3,000 customer consul-

tations, providing technical assistance across 47,097 acres in the state. This includes conservation planning and habitat recommendations designed to meet the goals of farmer and landowner customers, ensuring their operations are profitable and their concerns for soil, water and wildlife are addressed.

### About Pheasants Forever and Quail Forever

Pheasants Forever and Quail Forever make up the nation’s largest nonprofit organization dedicated to upland habitat conservation. This community of more than 480,000 members, supporters and partners is dedicated to the protection of our uplands through habitat improvement, public access, education and advocacy. A network of 754 local chapters spread across North America determine how 100 percent of their locally raised funds are spent — the only national conservation organization that operates through this grassroots structure. Since its creation in 1982, the organization has dedicated more than \$1 billion to 580,000 habitat projects benefiting 28.8 million acres.



## OUTDOOR CONNECTION

# AN UPDATE ON REINTRODUCTION OF PADDLEFISH: KENUE COFFEE HOUR

By STEVE WEISMAN  
OUTDOOR EDITOR

One thing that I like about retirement is that I can get up as early or as late as I want or stay up as late as I want. At the same time, there are often things going on during the week that my wife and I couldn't partake in when we were working.

One of the activities we enjoy going to the first or second Thursday of every month is the Kenue Coffee Hour at the Dickinson County Nature Center's Maser Monarch Lodge. The nice thing is they are free and each month centers on a specific nature topic. So, when our longtime friends Bill and Mary Beardsley asked us in early April if we wanted to attend a coffee hour featuring "Paddlefish in West Okoboji" presented by Iowa DNR Fisheries Biologist, Mike Hawkins, our answer was a resounding, "Yes!"

After all, I had attended the original Hawkins announcement of the reintroduction of the paddlefish into West Okoboji at last August's Okoboji Blue Water Festival, and then I was at the Emerson Bay Boat ramp in October when the paddlefish were released. So, this was going to be an update on the paddlefish reintroduction.

### Multi-state cooperation

According to Hawkins, "The American paddlefish is actually the only species of paddlefish left in the world. There are currently 20 states cooperating in helping expand the paddlefish population and territory. Restoration efforts have been very successful across the Midwest and here in the Missouri and Mississippi river systems in Iowa."

Looking at their earlier existence in the Okobojis, Hawkins says, "Research shows that this fish has been gone from the Iowa Great Lakes since about 1919, and as far as the DNR can tell, the paddlefish were native to the Iowa Great



DNR personnel place small transmitter tags in 25 paddlefish before they were released at Emerson Bay boat ramp last October.

Photo by Steve Weisman

Lakes. Historically, there are lots of photographs floating around of paddlefish being taken in the early 1900s through about 1919."

They disappeared because of fragmentation of the river systems with the dams that were put in place. Those dams would stop the upstream migration. So, it wasn't long, and the paddlefish disappeared.

Will they reproduce in the Okoboji chain? According to Hawkins, "Most likely not. These fish don't reproduce in lake systems and are a river fish. They need flowing water to spawn!"

Hawkins talked about the fish being stocked. "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!"

### Where will they go?

That's a good question. "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 placed small transmitter tags into the body cavity of 25 of the released fish. The tags are expensive with each one costing \$360. We were very fortunate that private donors took care of the entire cost."

As for collecting data, Hawkins says, "We already have a number of receivers located in different parts of West and East Okoboji to track tagged muskies. Our plan is to gather 'paddlefish' movement from these tagged paddlefish in early summer."

Hawkins did note, however, as they were checking for muskies prior to gillnetting, one paddlefish was found in north end of East Okoboji near the Spirit Lake Hatchery! Now that's quite a trip since October!



A net full of paddlefish ready to head out on West Okoboji.

Photo by Steve Weisman

# Early season walleyes on jigs

By BOB JENSEN

If you're going fishing for walleyes tomorrow on one of the rivers that criss-cross the Midwest, a jig will probably be the best choice of lures. If you won't be chasing walleyes until early summer, or even later, a jig will still be a very good choice. When walleyes are the quarry, and when it's early in the season, a jig is tough to beat.

Jigs come in all shapes, sizes, and colors. Selecting the jig that matches the conditions being fished is pretty important, but selecting the appropriate jig is also pretty simple. Following are some ideas for selecting an effective jig for catching walleyes early and later in the season.

At this time of the year, rivers and some lakes are often stained by run-off water. It's important to remember that in stained water, and especially when the water is cold, we should crawl our jigs along the bottom, especially if there aren't a lot of snags in the area being fished. A stand-up jighead is a good choice. his jig will be most effective as it crawls across the bottom because, when paused, the minnow that it's tipped with will remain in an upright position, making it more visible to the walleyes. A round head jig when paused on the bottom will lay on its side and be less visible.

When the fish are active or spread out, a jig tipped with plastic will be better. Try a jig tipped with a smaller Rage Swimmer or a Mr. Crappie Grub. These baits will allow an angler to fish a bit faster and maybe show your bait to more walleyes. You won't want to work this combo on the bottom like we did with the jig and minnow set-up.

A swimming retrieve will usually be better. Cast the jig out, let it sink to within about a foot of the bottom, then be-



Fishing guide Joe Honer uses jigs to catch walleyes year 'round.

Photo by Bob Jensen

gin the retrieve. Just reel the jig slowly with your rod tip in about the two o'clock position. Maybe let it sink closer to the bottom every now and then, but mostly swim it just above the bottom to avoid snags.

Use a jig-head of one color with a body of another color. Sometimes the fish want a particular color, and if you show them two colors on the same jig, you're increasing the odds of showing them the color they want on that day. An orange

jighead with a chartreuse piece of plastic is a walleye-catcher in many places.

Six or eight pound test line works very well with jigs. If a sixteenth or eighth ounce jig is being used, six pound line would be a good choice, while eight pound line would be good with heavier jigs. Sometimes eight pound line with eighth ounce jigs will be very productive if you want to slow the speed at which the bait falls. The larger diameter

of the eight pound line creates a bit more water resistance, and that allows the bait to fall a tad slower. If the area being fished has more snags, line that's a little heavier will allow you to save a few jigs that might have been lost with lighter line.

Jigs, for the next few weeks, will probably be the best bet for walleyes. In fact, whenever and whenever you're trying to catch a walleye, a jig in some form will be a good choice.

## NETTING, Continued from Page 1C

Musky netting included a total of 50 males and 21 females from East Okoboji and 32 males and 15 females from Big Spirit Lake.

### The second night: a match

After what happened on Wednesday night, there was a good chance that Thursday night's gill netting would produce similar results. Following Wednesday's results, crews only ran gill nets on Big Spirit Lake. Sure enough, a total of 463 females were brought to the Hatchery. Of that number, 223 were green, 226 were ripe and 14 were spent. At the same time with the number of males brought in on the first night, there was no need for any more males. However, the crews figured they returned around 400 males back to the lake.

Meanwhile, the musky gill netting on Thursday night was still relatively slow with 19 males and 13 females. Still not enough females had been taken, but Hawkins was sure a couple of days of increased temperatures would do the trick.

### Looking at the results

By Friday morning, the Hatchery tanks were filled to the max with broodstock walleye and muskies. The entire crew was tired but also ecstatic with the results. Hawkins reflected on the success. "For many years, it would take us up to five nights of gill netting



Scott Grummer, Clear Lake Fisheries Biologist, strips eggs from a top-of-the-slot female walleye.

Photo by Steve Weisman

to get the broodstock that we needed. Our regulation changes have helped give us a greater broodstock population and also increased overall numbers."

Before the first slot size was implemented in 2007, the Iowa Great Lakes had a minimum length limit of 14" that

had been in place from the late 1980s. Over that time, biologists documented several periods when walleye would "stockpile" just below the 14" length limit. In some years, anglers would have to sort through dozens of small fish to finally catch one 14" walleye at the Iowa Great Lakes.

As soon as they reached 14", many of them were caught by anglers, and even though there was a decent population of broodstock, recruitment to broodstock size was difficult.

In January of 2007, a slot size limit of 17" to 22" was established. That helped recruitment, but by the early 2020s, data showed that moving the slot limit to 19" to 25" would help increase the top of the slot, while allowing anglers to catch smaller size broodstock in that 17" to 18+ inch length and increase the protection at the top of the slot.

The result of all this? The 19" to 25" has helped anglers catch more of the slower growing males before they hit 19" while increasing the top of slot to 25" has protected the faster growing females.

As a result, Hawkins says, "We have a great population of big broodstock walleyes right now. We get nearly a quart of eggs per female."

Now, it's a matter of taking the eggs through the many processes to become fry for stocking.

Lakes in our area receiving walleye fry include Center Lake, East Okoboji, Silver Lake, Spirit Lake and West Okoboji in Dickinson County; Ingham Lake, Iowa Lake, Tuttle Lake and West Swan Lake in Emmet County; Five Island Lake, Lost Island Lake and Silver Lake in Palo Alto County.

## LAKE, Continued from Page 1C

place so that with, hopefully, good spring rains West Swan Lake will be filled. According to Hawkins, recent rains in late March and early April have raised the lake levels by about two feet bringing the water levels to the base of the boat ramp. If timely rains continue and water begins running out of Ingham Lake, then West Swan has a good chance of attaining a full level.

Fish stocking has begun with 1,500 pre-spawn adult perch recently stocked. These adult perch came from South Dakota. In

addition, 140,000 northern pike fry have been introduced followed by adult bluegill and largemouth bass later this spring.

### Drone potential

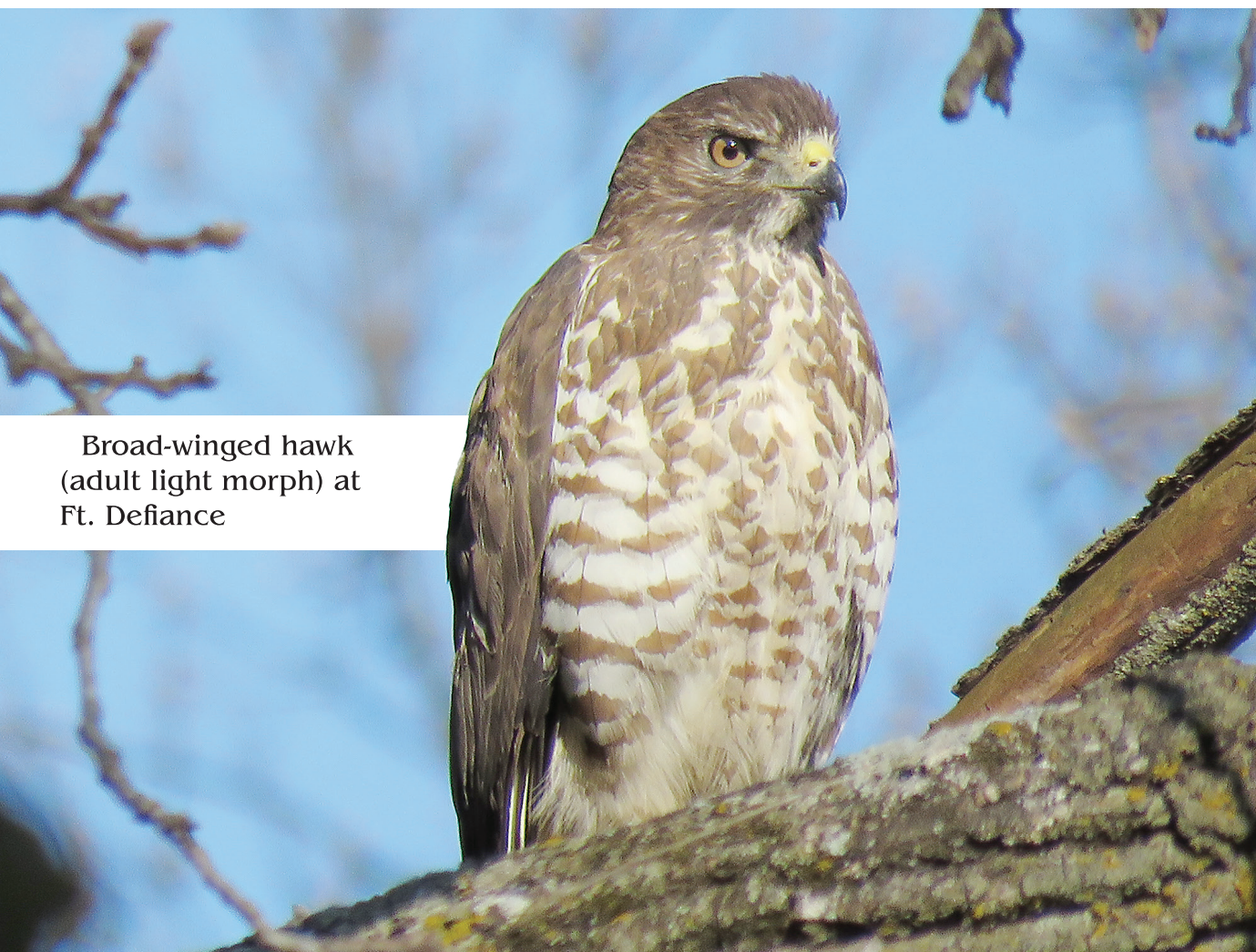
Following the use of the agricultural drone, Flammang sees a lot of potential for future uses, "some that haven't even been considered at this point." For this type of application, Flammang sees that the drone "allows us to get into locations where we can't get a boat." Areas such

as adjacent sloughs and wetlands, which were difficult or impossible to access by boat, are now easily accessible with the drone. These are all places that common carp can avoid a renovation.

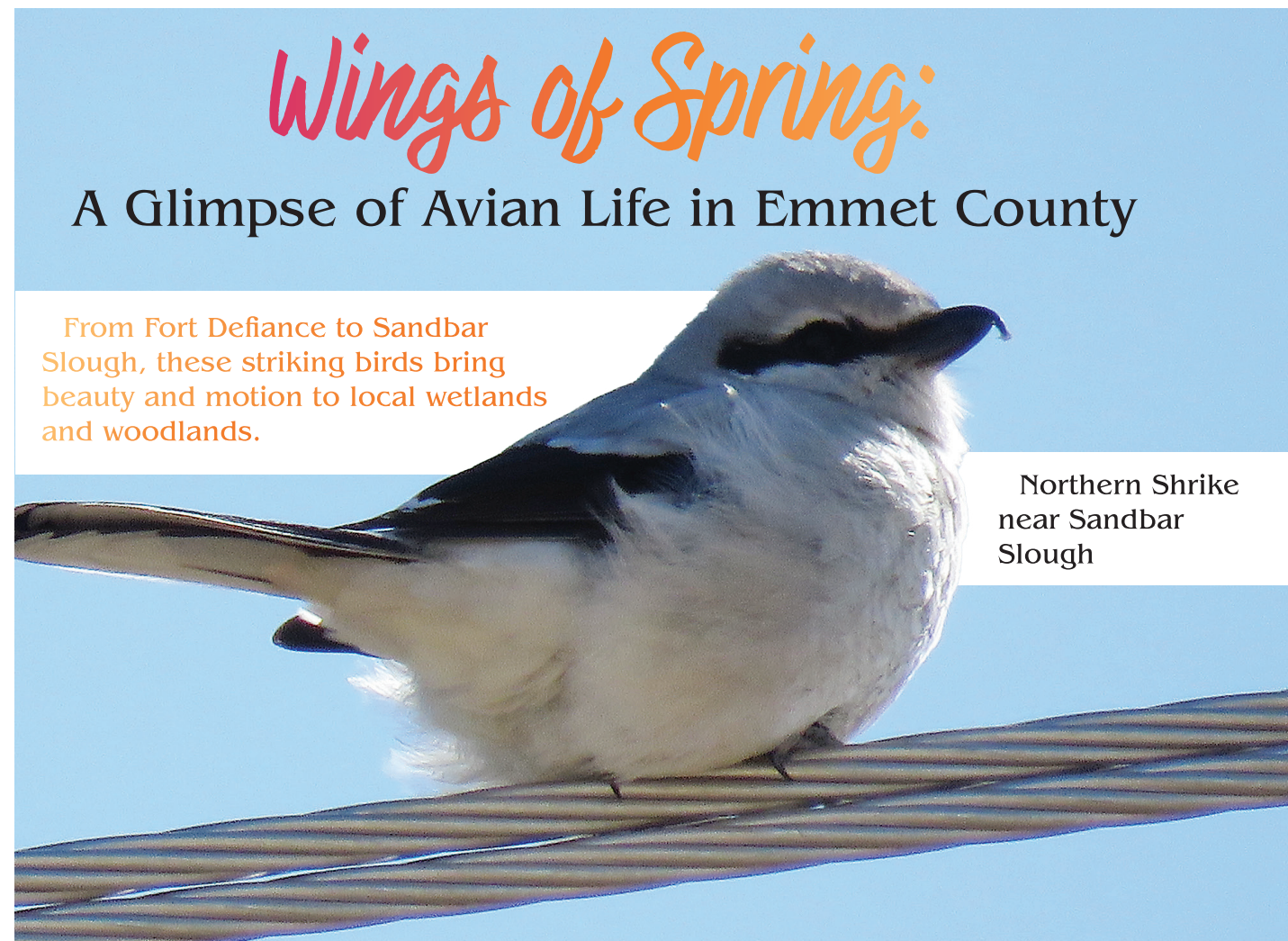
To me, this is what is most exciting: drone usage potential. Technology continues to expand. The use of the drone in this case is limited to a person calibrating and running the drone with complete precision. It's more cost and time effective. Pretty amazing, I'd say!



# OUTDOOR CONNECTION



Broad-winged hawk  
(adult light morph) at  
Ft. Defiance



Northern Shrike  
near Sandbar  
Slough

## Wings of Spring:

A Glimpse of Avian Life in Emmet County

From Fort Defiance to Sandbar  
Slough, these striking birds bring  
beauty and motion to local wetlands  
and woodlands.

Photos by MIKE  
FREDRICKSON

Contact him to purchase photos 712-209-4907



Great Blue Heron at grade



Northern Shoveler pair at grade



Wood Duck pair at  
Sandbar Slough

**Inspiration for Our Day-** "The Lord shall preserve you from all evil; He shall preserve your soul. The Lord shall preserve your going out and your coming in from this time forth, and even forevermore." ~Psalm 121:7-8

**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



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**

**24 Hour  
Emergency  
Service!**

John Thate - Owner  
**800.225.8733**

www.thatetree.com • Fully Insured

**FREE  
ESTIMATES!**