

OUTDOORS DIGEST

OF THE OUTDOORS | GARY HOWEY

Enjoy Winterfest At Ponca State Park On Dec. 29

LINCOLN, Neb. — Spend a winter day at scenic Ponca State Park on Dec. 29 and enjoy indoor and outdoor activities for the entire family. Winterfest is an all-day event designed to allow visitors to rekindle wintertime family traditions. Indoor activities include art display, crafts, wine and cheese tasting, soup supper, and entertainment. Outdoor activities include sledding (if weather permits), fruitcake flinging contest, children's kindling hunt, Yule Log Quest, bonfire and hayrack rides. The Yule Log Quest is a team competition to locate the log within the park. Teams will complete tasks to earn clues to find the log. The kindling found in the children's contest will be used to light the log for the bonfire. A park entry permit is required for each vehicle entering the park. For more information, call the park at 402-755-2284.

S.D. State Parks First Day Hikes Across State Jan. 1

PIERRE — South Dakota state parks will sponsor free, guided hikes in 12 state parks on New Year's Day as part of America's State Parks First Day Hikes initiative in all 50 states. America's State Parks First Day Hikes offer individuals and families an opportunity to begin the New Year rejuvenating and connecting with the outdoors by taking a healthy hike on Jan. 1 at a state park close to home. First Day Hikes offer a great way to get outside, exercise, enjoy nature and welcome the New Year with friends and family. "We are excited to host First Day Hikes as part of this national effort to get people outdoors and into our parks. First Day Hikes are a great way to cure cabin fever and burn off those extra holiday calories by starting off the New Year with an invigorating walk or hike in one of our beautiful state parks," said State Parks and Recreation Director Doug Hofer.

First Day Hikes originated more than two decades ago at the Blue Hills Reservation, a state park in Milton, Mass. The program was launched to promote both healthy lifestyles throughout the year and year-round recreation at state parks. Last year marked the first time all 50 state park systems sponsored First Day Hikes, offering 400 hikes nationwide. In South Dakota, hikes will be offered at the following area locations: • New Year's Bird Count Walk, Lewis and Clark Recreation Area near Yankton, 10 a.m. CST. Info: 605-668-2985 • New Year's Get Out and Go Scavenger Hunt, Adams Homestead Nature Area near North Sioux City, 1 p.m. CST. Info: 605-232-0873 • Lewis and Clark History Hike, Spirit Mound Historic Prairie near Vermillion, 1 p.m. CST, pre-registration required. Info/register: 605-987-2263

Antlerless Only Tags Valid For Deer Season Dec. 29

PIERRE — Deer hunters who have unfilled antlerless deer tags for the East and West River Deer Seasons will have nine additional days available to harvest antlerless deer beginning Dec. 29 and ending on Jan. 6. South Dakota Game Fish and Parks Terrestrial Chief Tom Kirschenmann reminds hunters to be aware of the regulation change from the past several years. "Over the past several seasons, 'any deer' tags have converted to 'antlerless' tags for the extended season," Kirschenmann said. "That is not the case this year. Only unfilled 'antlerless' tags will be valid during the late season." The changes were made as part of deer herd management objectives to direct additional antlerless harvest in the areas of the state that need it most while curtailing the doe harvest in areas where it is not needed.

New S.D. Pheasants Forever Chapter Breaks Ground

HOT SPRINGS — Hunters and conservationists in Hot Springs have formed a new Pheasants Forever chapter. Known as the Southern Hills Pheasants Forever chapter, the group is committed to improving the area's wildlife habitat, strengthening the population of upland species and establishing Fall River County as a leader for upland conservation. The chapter is led by Brian Spitzer, a Hot Springs resident and the chapter's newly elected president. "Our chapter is looking forward to raising the conservation bar in Hot Springs," says Spitzer. "This area of South Dakota has not had a Pheasants Forever chapter prior to the Southern Hills chapter, and the surrounding area is receptive and eager to be a part of the organization's conservation mission in Hot Springs." Pheasants Forever empowers county and local chapters with the responsibility to determine how 100 percent of their locally raised conservation funds will be spent — the only national conservation organization that operates through this truly grassroots structure.

Renew Boat Registrations In December

LINCOLN, Neb. — Nebraska boat registrations are issued for three-year periods, expiring on Dec. 31 of the third year. Early December is a good time to renew registrations, which may be done at the county treasurer's office or at OutdoorNebraska.org/boating. Boat owners must obtain new registrations from their county treasurer. For more information about boating requirements, pick up a copy of the 2013 Boating Guide where Nebraska Game and Parks Commission permits are sold or at OutdoorNebraska.org/boating.

BY GARY HOWEY
Hartington, Neb.

As we headed west off of Highway 281 to rendezvous with a group of hunters from Huron, it quickly became apparent that the area around Huron area was the home of excellent wildlife habitat. Team Outdoorsmen Adventures member Larry Myhre (Sioux City, Iowa) and I would be pheasant hunting just south of Huron with Danny Hofer and a group of friends who had it all together when it came to pheasant hunting. As any outdoorsmen or women knows, habitat is the key to healthy wildlife populations and what this group had done to make their land attractive to wildlife was unbelievable. Over the years, they've planted and managed the land, creating a hunters paradise.

On the land we'd be hunting, were 50 acres of food plots, 100 acres of grass, 88 acres of trees with grass, 38 acres of new tree plantings, as well as 50 acres of existing trees. All total, they'd planted 3,800 trees.

Adding to the habitat in the immediate area was a huge tract of state wildlife management area, making it attractive to all species of wildlife including pheasant, deer and of course predators such as coyotes, raccoons, opossums and skunks.

To keep the predators from over running the place, they'd implemented a trapping program helping to keep their numbers under control. Arriving at the farm we'd be hunting, it was obvious that these boys were serious hunters as they had a farmhouse set up for their friends and guests to stay in and a large metal building where they kept their gear, bus and a place to meet before and after the hunt.

After meeting the group and because we were hunting the late season, we were hunting educated birds, Danny, using a map, laid out the plan for all to see, allowing everyone in the group to know how the land lay. This way, everyone in the group would know where we'd be hunting and where each group, the walkers, wingmen and blockers would be positioned.

It was obvious these boys knew pheasant hunting and the group worked well together, like a well oiled machine.



Gary HOWEY



Danny Hofer of Huron knows if you want to have good pheasant numbers you need to put in the extra effort to develop good habitat.

Boarding the modified school bus, comfortably equipped with bench seats, gun racks, as well as dog boxes, we headed north to our first field, knee high native grass adjacent to some wetlands. Danny, Larry, I and another hunter would be stationed at the end of the filed, blocking the escape route of the birds running ahead of our walkers.

Larry worked out along the right wing while I manned the camera between he and Danny. It didn't take long before birds began flushing out the sides of the field, with any birds making the mistake of coming up within shotgun range of the walkers and approaching wingmen being added to our groups game bag. Suddenly, a rooster, cackling loudly, burst out of the cover between the wingman and Larry. In one smooth movement he shouldered his Benelli and fired, per-

haps to quickly as the bird continued on. Swinging with the bird, his second shot connected and the bird tumbled to the ground. As the walkers and dogs made their way through the thick grass, birds started coming out, with hunters yelling "Rooster, Hen Rooster" letting all know what was on the way. The next rooster blew out of the cover between Danny and Larry and I, with the bird centered in the screen of the camera, he came my way, then Danny's shotgun barked and the bird started to tumble, through my view finder it looked as if it was coming my way, which it was, tumbling just inches above my head, crashing a foot behind me. Working our way to the second field, we talked about our first field, a good one as we'd added eight birds to our game bag.

Kan. Gamebirds Down But Not Out

BY BRENT FRAZEE
(c) 2012 The Kansas City Star (Kansas City, Mo.)

In the midst of the worst Kansas pheasant season in at least a decade, it's difficult for hunters to have much optimism about the future. But Dave Dahlgren, small-game specialist for the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism, sees a ray of sunshine breaking through the gloom. No matter how bad things might seem, the situation could change quickly, Dahlgren said. "Pheasants are so highly reproductive that we could come out of this in a couple of years if we have perfect springs (when the birds nest)," Dahlgren said. "We've had times in the past when populations were way down and they bounced back rather quickly." Dahlgren points to the early 2000s. In 2001, pheasant populations were down and the harvest hit rock bottom. Hunters took only 400,000 birds, the lowest total in years. But aided by good nesting conditions, the pheasants quickly rebounded and hunters took 650,000 birds by 2003.

Looking for another example of how quickly pheasants can build their population? Dahlgren

also cites the first-ever release of the wild birds, which took place in 1887 in Oregon. Wildlife officials started with 18 hens and 10 roosters. In 10 years, numbers had grown to the point that a hunting season was opened. In the first weekend of the season, hunters harvested 50,000 birds. "One hen can lay 10 to 15 eggs," Dahlgren said. "The two things you need to get a successful nesting season are good habitat and good weather. "We can do something about the habitat, but the weather is out of our control." That's what got Kansas in trouble in the first place: two consecutive years of crippling drought. The dry conditions encouraged the early harvest of winter wheat, where pheasants

often nest. And the hot, dry conditions had a drastic effect on the survival rate of chicks. The cumulative effects of two years of dry weather definitely took their toll this year. That's why it's critical that the moisture returns in 2013. "If we have three straight years of drought, we'll be hurting," he said. But timely rains and even some snow cover that would add moisture to the ground could go a long way toward fueling a pheasant comeback. "We knew it would be bad this fall, based on our surveys," Dahlgren said. "But if this drought cycle breaks, we could see a totally different picture a couple years from now. We just have to hope for some better weather."

EXPERIENCED TAX ACCOUNTANT

NELSON & NELSON CPA'S is searching for an EXEPIERIENCED TAX ACCOUNTANT interested in working for a family owned firm in Sioux Falls, SD. Great opportunity for someone who would like to move to Sioux Falls AND work in a family friendly environment! This firm was established in 1927 and has clients in more than 25 states and many foreign countries. Applicant MUST have 2 years of INDIVIDUAL TAX PREPARATION EXPERIENCE. Quickbooks knowledge and experience is a plus! Interested applicants should e-mail their resume to HR@THEWESTONGROUP.COM or send to The Weston Group, 315 S. Phillips Avenue, Sioux Falls SD 57104. EOE.

Congratulations



Temptations Food Ribbon Cutting

The Yankton Chamber of Commerce Ambassador Committee hosted a ribbon cutting for Temptations Food located at 403 E. 4th St. Jeremy and Heather Birr, owners make their pizza dough and sauce fresh daily for their wood fired pizzas that are ready in 90 seconds! They also serve a variety of subs, kettle corn, not to mention their gourmet cupcakes, guaranteed to melt in your mouth! Open Mon-Thurs. 11-7p.m. and Fri-Sat. 11-8p.m. call (605)868-0706 for more information.

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TROPHY SPOTLIGHT



SUBMITTED PHOTO
Brooke Nelson , left, and Justine Mundorf are pictured with the deer they shot on the opening weekend of deer season. The deer were shot approximately 100 yards from each other in the Devils Nest, North of Lindy Neb.



FOOD DRIVE

The Yankton Daily Press & Dakotan is hosting a food drive for the Yankton County Contact Center Food Pantry throughout the month of December.

Donations may be dropped off at 319 Walnut Street, Yankton.

BONUS: Make a donation and receive a \$3 DISCOUNT off a private-party classified ad. Ads must run between Dec. 1-31, 2012.

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