

OUTDOORS DIGEST

Of The Outdoors | Gary Howey

Registration For Mickelson Trail Trek is Open

PIERRE – Registration is open for the 19th Annual Mickelson Trail Trek, and bicyclists can sign up online at mickelsontrail.com. South Dakota Department of Game, Fish and Parks officials encourage bicyclists to register early to ensure spots in the Trek, which will be held Sept. 16-18, 2016. The ride is limited to 600 participants. The annual supported ride highlights the George S. Mickelson Trail as it winds through the heart of the Black Hills, from Edgemont to Lead/Deadwood. More bicyclists are drawn to the Trek each year. The ride is open to everyone 14-years-old or older. Riders on the Trail Trek will cover the entire 109 miles of the trail over three days, from Friday, Sept. 16, through Sunday, Sept. 18, 2016. Registration before July 1, with merchandise, is \$190, without merchandise, \$160. Registration after July 1 is \$190, but merchandise is not available. The registration fee for the three-day ride includes a trail pass, shuttle service, refreshments, one meal and snacks during each day's ride. Riders are responsible for accommodations and mechanical support. Pre-registration is required and may be completed online by visiting mickelsontrail.com and following the "Trail Trek" link. The registration cutoff is Sept. 1, 2016. For more information on the Mickelson Trail Trek or the three-day Mickelson Trail Trek, visit mickelsontrail.com or contact the Black Hills Trails office at 605-584-3896.

GFP Commission Proposes Hunting Allowance For The Terminally Ill

PIERRE – The South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks Commission adopted a proposal at their December meeting that would provide a terminally ill South Dakota resident the opportunity to hunt big game. The Secretary may authorize a resident who has been diagnosed by a licensed doctor of medicine to have a terminal illness which is medically expected to significantly shorten their life expectancy to hunt deer, antelope and turkey. The proposed rule would also authorize the Secretary to provide allowances for persons 25 and under who are fighting cancer, other terminal illnesses or a disease which will significantly reduce their life expectancy. The proposed rule would allow hunting only during established hunting seasons, and would allow the hunter to take no more than one deer, antelope and turkey. The proposal also allows that certain restrictions may be waived or additional terms or conditions may be imposed necessary to facilitate participation for the person receiving authorization. The Commission will finalize this proposal at their Jan. 14-15 meeting at the Pierre Red Rossa meeting room. Written comments can be sent to wildinfo@state.sd.us. To be part of the official public record, comments must be received by 12 p.m. on Jan. 14. Please include your full name along with the city and state of residence. If you would like to comment in person, the public hearing will be held Jan. 14, at 2 p.m. CDT at the Pierre Red Rossa meeting room.

South Dakota Bighorn Sheep Season Set

PIERRE – The South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks Commission proposed no changes for the 2016 bighorn sheep season, and will operate under the same structure as the 2015 season. The 2016 bighorn sheep hunting season will run from Sept. 1 – Dec. 31. There will be three "ram bighorn sheep" licenses available, one of which will be available via the Midwest Chapter of the Wild Sheep Foundation's auction.

Nebraska's 20th Bighorn Likely A Record-Setter

Not only will a bighorn sheep harvested near Crawford in Nebraska's Pine Ridge region on Wednesday have the special distinction of being the state's 20th but also will likely go down as the state's largest on record. Terry Bogle of Lincoln harvested the big ram at about 10:15 a.m. Wednesday on private property in the shadow of a steep cliff near a pair of northwestern Nebraska's most prominent landmarks, Crow Butte and Little Crow Butte. The sheep unofficially scored 189 on the Boone and Crockett Club scale. If the score holds after a 60-day drying period, as it is expected to, it will surpass the previous record of 185 7/8 recorded in 1998 – the first year of the Commission's bighorn hunt. "Not all the sheep that have been harvested since our reintroduction efforts began were scored, but we're fairly certain this score is the largest," said Todd Nordeen, the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission wildlife manager who manages the state's bighorn sheep program and led the hunt. "We've had sheep with longer horns, but this one has incredible mass."

The Boone and Crockett score is formulated from each of the horns' length plus four points of circumference. The ram is not only expected to go down as the state record, but also meets criteria to be listed in Boone and Crockett's prestigious "Records of North American Big Game" publication. Bogle, who shot his first deer just over three decades ago on public property in the Pine Ridge, won the bighorn sheep permit earlier this year from a drawing with about 2,300 entries. He was accompanied by hunting buddy Bob Dykeman of Lincoln and guided by Nordeen and Commission conservation technicians Rick Arnold, Laura McHale and Brandon Tritsch. Bighorn sheep were native to the butte country of the Nebraska Panhandle, but disappeared from the landscape in the early 1900s because of disease, unregulated hunting and habitat loss. The state's only other permit holder for 2015, Barbara Sackman of Long Island, New York, harvested a ram in the Wildcat Hills last week – the first for that region in modern times. Nordeen said the 20 hunts, along with support from conservation organizations, have been essential to funding the bighorn sheep program.

Safety First When Ice Fishing

BY GARY HOWEY
Hartington, Neb.

It happens every year around this time of the year, when we have calls at the office asking about ice fishing and where they're biting.

With the colder temperatures we've had so far this winter, there hasn't been a lot of ice made and with the warmer weather coming, it's going to be awhile before there's good ice.

There may be some ice building on bodies of water not snow covered, but on those ponds and lakes with snow piled on them, it's more than likely not happening or happening very slowly.

Snow that piles on the unfrozen ground does the same thing to the ice; it acts as an insulator, not allowing the cold temperatures to get down and freeze the ground or the water.

Sure the ice may look solid, especially along the shoreline where the snow has blown clear, when in fact there are probably areas on the lake that have very little ice because of the snow that covers it.

Before heading out on any body of water to ice fish, we need to be aware of the potential dangers of ice.

The color of the ice is a good indicator to its strength. Look for clear blue ice, which is the strongest because it's created by a sustained freeze.

Black, gray or honeycombed ice is unsafe because of repeated freezing and thawing. Discolored or dark spots suggest open water, thin ice, or possibly a spring, all of which are dangerous.

As I mentioned earlier in this



PHOTO: GARY HOWEY

Think safety first when heading out onto the ice, as a good four inches of ice will support a small group of people walking single file while it would take at least six plus inches of good ice to support a UTV, ATV or snowmobile.

column, snow cover insulates the ice, inhibiting solid ice formation and making it almost impossible to judge the thickness.

Icehouses, fishing piers and bridges absorb the sun's heat and increase melting and vegetation will also absorb heat from the sun and rotting vegetation can create its own heat. Fish, muskrats, beaver and other animals swimming under the ice can also weaken it. This is especially true in shallow lakes and rivers.

Any moving water weakens ice approximately 15 percent and wind creates pumping action forces water through the breaks and cracks enlarging them and making them bigger over a short period.

If your crossing ice on foot and you're not sure of the thickness of the ice, it's safer to slide your feet instead of stepping, helping distribute your weight more evenly.

It's also not a bad idea to carry an ice chisel to check the thickness of the ice as you work your way across

the ice.

Another good idea is to carry along some sort of rescue equipment in case you break through the ice. Frabill's makes ice picks worn on the outside of your clothing, not tucked away in a pocket and hard to get at. In between the two ice picks is 72 inches of stretchable cord connect the two retractable, hand-held spikes. A durable guard, activated only with downward pressure, covers the spikes and used to pull you back on the ice if you should happen to fall through.

Once you're back on the ice, roll away from the hole instead of standing up, helping you to get to thicker safe ice.

Listed below is a general rule of thumb as to how much ice it takes to support you and your equipment on clear-blue ice formed under ideal conditions.

(Earlier in the winter, it's a good idea to double the thickness to be safe).



Gary HOWEY

Kansas Man Has Blind Ambition For Creative Hunting

BY MICHAEL PEARCE

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MONTGOMERY COUNTY, Kan. – For 31 years, building better airplanes has helped Khoua Thao provide life's essentials for his family. Now, the Textron Aviation mechanical engineer is turning to part of an airplane to provide recreation and, he hopes, a tighter bond as a family.

"I would love to have my kids get more involved in the outdoors, so I wanted to build something to get out of the weather, where they could come with me and be more comfortable," said Thao, 52, as he worked earlier this fall to get a large chunk of airplane fuselage converted into a "wildlife observation station" for his three children and friends. "I just want them to see some of what I see when I am outdoors. I want to share that with the people I love, at this place that I love so much."

"This place" is about 57 acres Thao has purchased near Independence. Small by Kansas standards, it is more than twice the size of the place his family of seven farmed for subsistence in Laos before communists over-ran his country, about the same time they did the same to South Vietnam in 1975.

"My people fought the communists, so when they came we had no choice but to leave," Thao said. The chunk of unwanted airplane he's using for a blind is bigger than where his family lived after being forced from their homeland.

"We lived in a tent for



MICHAEL PEARCE/WICHITA EAGLE/TNS

Khoua Thao has used a discarded airplane fuselage to create a hunting/wildlife viewing blind on his land in southeast Kansas.

year-and-a-half in Thailand, in a refugee camp," Thao said. "That's where I studied English, to get ready to come here."

They ended up in Selma, Ala., in 1976. Like so many he knows who immigrated from southeast Asia, he has wasted little time trying to better himself after arriving in the southeastern U.S.

Thao got his mechanical engineering degree at the University of Alabama. A job offer with Beech Aircraft brought him to Wichita. His specialty has become working with propulsion systems, a career that has served him well enough to buy some property in northern Arkansas about seven years ago.

"The hills, and the clear streams, really reminded me of my homeland in Laos," Thao said. "Seeing deer tracks on that land got me to thinking that if I have a lot of deer there,

I might as well learn to hunt."

An avid angler since his youth in Laos, Thao admits he is still facing a steep learning curve when it comes to hunting. His first hunting season in Arkansas he never caught even a glimpse of a live deer. But he liked what he experienced so much he decided to buy property closer to his home.

He bought the land near Independence in 2014, where he has worked hard to improve the wildlife habitat and improve his hunting chances by adding tree stands and, eventually, his rather unique blind.

Thao got the idea of creating such a blind when Textron announced they were auctioning off parts of some planes. The section he bought came from a Hawker 4000 mid-sized business jet.

"Airplanes are in my blood. They are what I do," he said. "I took one look and thought this

was a good way to use part of what I do for a living and use it for what I love to do as a hobby. The thought just got me so excited."

Thao admits he'd have saved a lot of time and money buying a \$100, tent-like pop-up blind. It wasn't an option that appealed to him.

"As an engineer, I always appreciate the way something is made," he said. "If I pick up a can, I think, 'wow, somebody made that,' and I start thinking how it was done."

Making sure everything was done to his exacting standards meant Thao invested about 200 hours converting the carbon-fiber fuselage into a blind for his property. He prefers to not say how much he's invested financially.

The money and the equivalent of five work weeks of labor includes rebuilding the dilapidated trailer he used to get the fuselage to his land. Most of the materials used are what he already had laying around.

"I found that brass knob in a drawer," he said, pointing to a thumb-sized knob on a door. "Engineers don't throw anything away if we think it might be useful sometime. Almost all of this, I already had." That includes the white carpeting on the blind's floor.

End caps were made from plywood, and have been painted to look like a woodland scene. Ever a perfectionist, he even added patches of shadows to simulate realism. The main part of the fuselage is now covered in a camouflage cloth, as is the trailer that has had its wheels removed. He used the

Two inches or less — Keep Off. Four inches will support a group of people walking single file.

Five and a half to six inches needed to support a snowmobile, UTV or ATV.

Eight to twelve inches needed to support an automobile.

Twelve to fifteen inches needed to support a pickup or truck.

If you have someone that falls through the ice, remember to: Reach Throw, Go.

First, try to REACH the victim with a long pole, board, rope or blanket.

Second, THROW the victim a life jacket, empty water jug, or other buoyant object.

As a last resort, go to the victim. Should this be necessary, form a human chain to reach the victim? A human chain can be made by lying on the ice with each person holding the feet of the person in front of them.

Early Ice fishing can be very productive and a lot of fun, venturing out onto the ice to early can lead to a disaster, so don't rush to get on the ice.

Cold weather and ice will be around for several months and no fish is worth putting your life in danger!

Gary Howey, Hartington, Nebraska, is a former tournament angler, fishing and hunting guide. He is the Producer/Host of the award winning *Outdoorsmen Adventures television series*, seen locally in Channels 2 and 98 at Saturday at 6:30 pm and Sunday at 7:00 am and on the *MIDCO Sports Network Thursday at 5:30 pm and Sunday at 10:00 am*. The show airs in nine states in the upper Midwest. He and Simon Fuller Co-Host the *Outdoor Adventures radio program on Classic Hits 106.3, ESPN Sports Radio 1570 in Southeastern South Dakota, Northeast Nebraska and on KCHE 92.1 FM in Northwest Iowa*. For more outdoor information, check out www.outdoorsmenadventures.com.

Nebraska Deer Harvest Up 11 Percent

LINCOLN, Neb. – Total deer harvest in Nebraska is up 11 percent compared to this time one year ago.

As of Dec. 8, nearly 50,000 deer have been harvested, compared to 45,000 last year and 42,500 in 2013.

The biggest change is the mule deer buck harvest of 8,307 – up 1,200 from 2014. That is an increase of 17 percent from last year and 25 percent from 2013.

"This is great news for hunters, as mule deer are clearly responding to good weather and a reduction in doe harvest over the past five years," said Kit Hams, big game program manager for the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission.

Whitetail buck harvest (26,846) is up 3,128 animals. That is a jump of 13 percent from last year and 18 percent from 2013.

"We are pleased to see the increases in whitetail bucks as the herd continues to recover from the drought and EHD events of 2012," Hams said. Archery and Muzzleloader

seasons continue through Dec. 31, while the Late Antlerless season is Jan. 1 – 15, 2016.

"We expect hunters to harvest about 57,000 deer this year, which is well below the 88,014 taken in 2010, but well ahead of the 48,000 taken in 2013," Hams said.

Archery, Muzzleloader, Youth, River Antlerless and

some Season Choice antlerless permits remain available throughout the state. They may be purchased at Game and Parks permitting offices or at OutdoorNebraska.org.

Hunters are reminded that mule deer does are protected in many management units and public lands across the state. Refer to the 2015 Big Game Guide for details.

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Our hearts are full of gratitude when we say many thanks to family members, friends and neighbors for all acts of kindness and sympathy: food, flowers, memorials, cards, visits and kind words spoken to our family regarding the recent passing of a wonderful husband, father, grandfather, great-grandfather and great-great grandfather, **Ben Arens**. We want to express special appreciation to the Rev. Robert Wulweber and Rev. Larry Regynski for their many words of comfort and hope. We are sincerely appreciative of the professional arrangements and special services provided by the staff at Opsahl-Kostel Funeral Home - Kevin, Tammy, Ted, and Cheryl. We want to thank the Sacred Heart Choir, Emily Nelson, Scott Olson, Sam Arens and Laura Nelson for the special music at his services. Thank you to the Sacred Heart Funeral Committee for the delicious meal and all their hard work. Additionally, we offer our heartfelt appreciation to Dr. Pietz, Dr. Mikkelsen, Dr. Irwin, the nurses, PCTs, lab techs, nutritional aides, and all the amazing staff at Avera Sacred Heart Hospital for their professional and exceptional care. Ben will always be remembered for his humor, smile and love for his family and many friends. We wish you all a very joyful holiday season.

Theresa Arens and family