

## OUTDOORSUPDATE

OUTDOOR  
REPORTOakwood Lakes  
State Park To Host  
Winter Events

VOLGA — Oakwood Lake State Park hosts the Kool Kids' Classic Fishing Derby and the Groundhog Day Cross-Country Ski Tour on Saturday, Jan. 29, and Sunday, Jan. 30.

Children younger than 14 are invited to take part in the Kool Kids' Classic Ice Fishing Derby. Registration for the derby is \$2 and will take place at the park shop at 11 a.m. CST. The first 150 entries will receive free fishing poles made by park staff. Bait is furnished, and event staff will drill holes in the ice as needed. Fishing will take place in designated areas from noon to 2 p.m., with weigh-in to follow. Winners will be announced at the 3 p.m. awards ceremony. Snacks will be available throughout the day, and numerous door-prize drawings will be held.

The 31st Annual Groundhog Day Cross-Country Ski Race and the Sons of Norway Barnelopt Children's Ski Run feature a 5-kilometer, non-competitive poker run, a 10-kilometer competitive race and a kick-sled race. Registration fees of \$8 for adults and \$3 for youth (17 and younger) applies to the ski race/poker run. Prizes will be awarded to winners in each age group. The top poker hands, youngest and oldest skier and most colorful ski costume will also earn awards.

The day also features the 24th Annual Sons of Norway Barnelopt Children's Ski Run. This event is free for kids younger than 13.

Registration for the ski events begins at the park shop at 12:30 p.m. The race will start at 1:30 p.m. Cookies, hot chocolate and various Norwegian treats will be served throughout the day. Ski rentals for the event are available from Sioux River Bicycles and Fitness. In the event of no snow, a walk will be held in place of the race.

The fishing derby is sponsored by the City of Brookings, Brookings Engraving, Brookings Radio, Gas 'N' More, Brookings Hy-Vee Food Store, Porter's Bait, 1481 Grille, South Dakota Division of Parks and Recreation, and Sports Connection.

The cross-country ski tour is sponsored by the Sons of Norway, Sioux River Bicycles and Fitness, Brookings Radio, 1481 Grille, Brookings Engraving and the state Division of Parks and Recreation.

Park entrance licenses are required to enter the park and will be available for purchase. For additional information on the weekend's events, call Oakwood Lakes State Park at 605-627-5441. For a calendar of other upcoming special events in South Dakota's state parks and recreation areas, visit [www.gip.sd.gov](http://www.gip.sd.gov).

Commissioners  
Expand Neb. Grouse  
Season

LINCOLN, Neb. — The Nebraska Game and Parks Board of Commissioners on Friday voted to expand the grouse-hunting season starting in 2011.

This year's grouse season will be Sept. 1 through Jan. 31, 2012. Regulations previously called for the season to open on the Saturday nearest Sept. 15.

By making the change, Game and Parks is providing more hunting opportunity for a lightly hunted species and is aligning the dove and grouse season openers on a common date.

The board also approved a revised Focus on Pheasants plan. The plan seeks to create new focus areas and incentive programs to promote habitat improvements and to work with biologists to maximize effectiveness of habitat program delivery within those areas. Also, the plan hopes to continue researching the amount of habitat needed to establish and maintain a huntable pheasant population, and it will try to secure more pheasant habitat through U.S. Department of Agriculture conservation programs.

Commissioners also approved the funding of \$254,383.60 for eight grants through the State Wildlife Grant (SWG) program, which addresses the needs of declining fish and wildlife populations. Game and Parks allocates part of its annual SWG funding, distributed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, to other conservation entities on a competitive basis, with awards required to provide a one-to-one match. The awarded projects must be deemed a priority in assisting Game and Parks in implementing the Nebraska Natural Legacy Plan.

Hunter Education  
Instructor Training In  
Dodge Set Feb. 16

LINCOLN, Neb. — The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission will train hunter education instructors on Feb. 16 in Dodge. Apprentice volunteer firearm instructors will be trained at 6 p.m. at the Dodge Volunteer Fire Department, 233 N. Oak St.

To register, visit [huntsafenebraska.org](http://huntsafenebraska.org), then click on the link Register for Outdoor Skills Events and Workshops. Participants also may contact Mike Streeper at (402) 471-6134 by Feb. 15 to register.

## OF THE OUTDOORS

## Spearing Through The Ice On Oahe

BY GARY HOWEY  
Hartington, Neb.

As our Polaris Ranger Crew UTV raced across the white landscape on the ice of Lake Oahe, I truly realized how large this lake truly was, as no matter what direction we'd look the frozen landscape of the lake reached as far as the eye could see.

My television crew, consisting of cameraman Kyle Nickolite, Larry Myhre, Bill Christensen and myself had made the journey north to Pierre to spend some time on the ice and in the field with good friends Larry, Dave and Paul Steffen of Steffen Brothers Outdoor Expeditions ([www.huntpiere.com](http://www.huntpiere.com)).

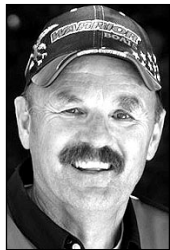
Upon arriving at our spearing shack, Paul quickly opened the three-foot by five-foot spearing hole, which had frozen overnight and fired up the propane heater. The 10-foot spears hung from hooks on the ceiling, with the two-foot of the spear containing the business end dangled below the water surface. Once a fish appeared, the spear was gently removed from the hook, quietly lowed above the fish and then dropped. The tricky part occurred once a fish was speared, as the roofs of the shack are only about six and a half foot tall, so in order to get the spear and fish out of the hole, the shack door would need to be opened and the spear walked out onto the ice.

The shack we were in was a dark house, which sat along a break in twelve foot of water that gradually rose up into ten foot. A dark house is one with no windows and once closed up allowed its occupants to clearly see the bottom and any fish that passed underneath it.

Below one spear a Rattle Trap was suspended while a white Berkley Gulp Twister Tail was suspended below the other. These were twitched from time to time to attract fish into the hole.

Paul explained that South Dakota was one of the few states allowing spear fishing through the ice of all species of game fish. In the state, spear fishing is allowed on the Missouri River reservoirs. Permits needed for spear fishing are the general fishing permit and a five-dollar spearing stamp.

When we first arrived I was amazed at the clarity of the water as the bottom



Gary  
Howey

could be seen quite clearly. To allow the bottom to stand out even when water clarity changed, Paul and his crew sprinkled corn underneath and along each side of the shack. The corn acted as a reflector, allowing us to view the bottom even when water clarity changed.

Because Oahe is a reservoir where water is discharged, there's a current in the lake and water clarity can change because of this water movement, since the amount of sunlight overhead may change, this will cut the amount of light penetration, which helps to illuminate the hole.

The areas the shacks were placed were in areas the Steffen's had taken fish over the years as these were locations that the fish used throughout the year to travel between the deep and shallow water.

We spent a couple of hours in the shack peering down the hole when I needed to get out, get a little air and move around a bit. I made the short trek to Larry and Bill's shack to see how they were doing and when I returned, Paul had speared a 4-pound walleye that had cruised in to look at the white twister tail below my spear.

Later that day, we had a small Perch and Gizzard Shad come in below us while the other shack missed a big Buffalo come through.

Several of the other houses did manage to take some smaller walleyes while we were there, but the migration through the area where the seventeen ice shacks were set hadn't really gotten into high gear.

Over the three years that Paul has been guiding spear fishermen, there have been days when up to fifty were seen below one house. If you're looking at taking a big fish, your chances are pretty good of doing it through the ice as Paul and his clients have speared numerous big walleyes and pike including walleyes in the ten to eleven pound class.

Business has been good for Paul and his ice spearing business as the day we departed the Steffen Brothers Lodge, they



Paul Steffen of Pierre is pictured with a four-pound walleye taken while spear fishing through the ice on Lake Oahe.

had thirty-four people booked to take out on the ice.

In between the spearing, we spent time in the field decoying and bagging our limits of geese and pheasant hunting with Larry and Dave Steffen.

Steffen Brothers offer a complete package with lodging, guided trips for open water fishing as well as waterfowl and pheasant hunting.

Once the major migration begins, we'll

head north hoping to get into some of the great action that happens below the ice on Lake Oahe.

Gary Howey, Hartington, Neb., is the producer/host of the award winning *Outdoorsmen Adventures* television series that airs on Fox affiliates throughout the upper Midwest. For more information on the *Outdoors* check out [www.outdoorsmenadventures.com](http://www.outdoorsmenadventures.com).

## Ice-Road Plow Jockey Keeps Paths Clear For Minnesota Anglers

BY DENNIS ANDERSON

(c) 2011, Star Tribune (Minneapolis)

ON FROZEN LAKE MILLE LACS, Minn. — As the sun set one Thursday over this seemingly endless sheet of snow and ice, Bill Marchel set the hook on what he thought was a walleye.

We were about 7 miles from shore, in a heated fish house, peering through cylinders of ice. Surrounding us, some nearer, others farther, lights shone through small windows of other fish houses, as anglers inhabiting them hoped, as Bill and I did, that Mille Lacs and its walleyes and perch would treat them generously.

But in winter, this big lake is more than a place for Minnesotans to fish. It's also a work site, particularly for those who — like the ice road truckers of television lore — keep the lake's winter roads open, and transport people and goods over them.

Terry Thurmer is one. For 21 years, Thurmer has owned Terry's Boat Harbor on the north end of Mille Lacs. In winter, while others on the lake wonder whether walleyes will bite and when, or whether they should move their fish house from one flat to the next, Thurmer worries about keeping his heavy-duty plow trucks running, about whether a crack will open in one of the many ice roads he maintains, and whether his rental houses are parked in the right spots, so his customers can catch fish.

"In this business, it's inevitable that you have truck breakdowns," Thurmer said. "It also seems inevitable that if it's going to snow, it'll snow on Fridays, just before everyone comes up for the weekend."

Thurmer plows and maintains about 40 miles of Mille Lacs ice road in winter, the main thoroughfares of which are about 150 feet wide.

"If they were narrower, and a strong wind came up, snow would fill them in," Thurmer said.

The Mille Lacs ice-road business has



DENNIS ANDERSON/MINNEAPOLIS STAR TRIBUNE/MCT  
Roger Bialke began his fishing foray on lake Mille Lacs in Minnesota by reeling in a perch.

changed through the years. Time was, said Thurmer, that no one drove on the lake unless it was covered with at least 15 inches of ice.

"Now in December you see people driving when there are only 9 or 10 inches," he said. "But not me. And not on my roads."

Thurmer's minimum ice depth for travel is 12 inches, and in December, employing an auger and a four-wheeler, he'll drill holes 6 or 7 miles onto the lake to make sure a full foot of ice covers his portion of the lake.

"If you start driving big trucks and wheel (fishing) houses on ice that is much thinner than that, nothing good will happen," he said.

Even when a foot of good ice covers Mille Lacs — and right now, in most parts

of the lake, there's a couple of feet, or close to it — pressure ridges can form and the lake can open up, exposing long, watery seams.

Usually these close again soon, perhaps overnight, as rising and falling temperatures cause the huge ice mass to expand and contract.

Thurmer, who deploys steel "ice bridges" to cover the fissures when they occur, takes these occasional schisms in stride.

"The first thing people need to know about driving on ice is that they need to drive slow," he said. "Just like they show on the 'Ice Road Truckers' TV show, if you drive fast, what you're doing is pushing a wave of water ahead of you under the ice, and when it reaches a weak spot, such as

a crack, it can blow up."

Eighteen-wheelers that tote supplies to mines and resorts in winter across the Canadian north travel only about 8 miles an hour. On Mille Lacs, Thurmer says no one should drive faster than 15 miles an hour.

Winter anglers also take risks if they free-lance across Mille Lacs from one spot to another, off established ice roads. Not only can pressure ridges present problems, but people can get stuck. Or lost.

"We get calls fairly regularly from guys on the lake who don't know where they are," Thurmer said.

Some weeks, Thurmer and his co-workers blow as much as \$2,000 for gas to keep their plows going. To recoup expenses, he charges vehicles \$10 a day in road fees, or \$25 for a weekend, Friday to Sunday.

"We go out as far as 9 Mile Flat and also cover most of the other major flats," he said. "The previous owner didn't plow anywhere near that much. But I knew if people had roads to get to the flats in winter, they'd go."

The other evening, not far from Bill and me, Roger Kramer was in his fish house, hunched over a couple of icy holes, accompanied by his German short-haired pointer, Sadie. Like us, Kramer had answered winter's siren call and was looking for a few fish.

Also not far away, Roger Bialke jigged in his cozy fish house, a plump perch lying at his feet.

And the fish on the end of Bill's line when he set the hook?

The one he hoped was a walleye? A perch, as it turned out. Soon, Bill rebaited his jigging spoon with a minnow head and dropped the rig again to Mille Lacs' cold, dark bottom.

We had more fishing to do before we followed our truck headlights over the long ice road leading to shore.

## State To Join Alliance In Bird Fight

ALLIANCE, Neb. (AP) — The Alliance City Council has taken dead aim at the overabundance of Canada geese and other birds at Laing Lake.

The birds' dropping create a health hazard, and the presence of the estimated 3,000 birds keeps people away from the fish-

ing lake and the surrounding park and its amenities.

Alliance radio station KCOW says Nebraska Game and Parks officials will help Alliance drive away the birds. The arsenal includes whistle bombs and pyrotechnics.

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