

Of The Outdoors | Gary Howey

Hold On Tight During Paddlefish Season

BY GARY HOWEY

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Fall, what a beautiful time of the year to spend time with family and friends on the river.



Gary
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Fifty to 60 degrees in late October just does not seem right, you have to love it, but it just does not seem right to be paddlefish snagging in short sleeves.

It was 9 a.m. when our team — guide Marlyn Wiebelhaus, Wynot, Nebraska, cameraman Larry Myhre, Sioux City, Iowa, my daughter Mieke Slaba, Grandson Teddy Slaba, Wagner and I — pulled away from the Nebraska boat dock. Our plan was to probe the waters of the Missouri River for the prehistoric looking paddlefish. Marlyn had chosen to fish down river, in order to avoid the crowded conditions found below the dam, where the shoreline and the surrounding waters would be crowded with anglers after paddlefish.

Motoring down river, Mother Nature's handiwork appeared with the vivid fall colors of the trees on the shoreline and the islands of the river illuminated by the early morning sunlight, adding to the overall experience.

Because of what these fish feed on, it is hard to believe they could reach weights of 100 pounds or better, but they do. Paddlefish are filter feeds, feeding on microscopic zooplankton they filter out of the water. Just last May Bill Harmon of Oacoma, while fishing during the Lake Francis Case paddlefish snagging season proved they can and will reach monstrous sizes as he broke the South Dakota State record, landing a brute weighing in at 127 pounds, 9 ounces.

Mieke had drawn her South Dakota Paddlefish tag, while I was fortunate to not only draw a South Dakota tag but also one for Nebraska.

This year, the number of holes or slack water pockets we could fish was limited as the huge volume of water coming through the dam, 45,000 through the spillway was surging down river, overtopping the sandbars and points, the slack water pools, which had held paddlefish earlier in the year. The huge volume of water coming downstream had pushed the fish out of many of their old haunts, scattering them throughout the river.

Armed with our three tags, we motored into the first hole that, in the past, were earlier this year, the paddlefish had stacked up behind, in order to avoid the swift current of the main river.

If you plan to fill a Paddlefish tag, you should be prepared, as the only way Paddlefish are caught is by snagging which can wear you out as it require a lot of casting and jerking.

Marlyn, who has spent hundreds if not thousands of hours on the river, knows the ins and outs when it comes to snagging. He prefers to troll for paddlefish, using long heavy rods rigged with large capacity reels and heavy Dacron line, allowing the angler to cover a lot of water with each jerk of the



PHOTO BY LARRY MYHRE

Author Gary Howey, Hartington, Nebraska, and daughter Mieke Slaba, Wagner, with their 2014 South Dakota/Nebraska Paddlefish taken on the last weekend of the paddlefish-snagging season.

rod and rods with enough strength to hold the heaviest of fish.

He will maneuver his boat in and out the holes while the angler pulls hard on the rod, allowing the 4-ounce weight with the 2/0 hook to rip up through the water, then allowing the rig to settle back to the bottom, only to be ripped skyward over and over again until a fish is hooked.

When you hook into a Paddlefish, no matter how small, you best be ready to hold on tight as you are pulling dead weight. Many times, you will be pulling the fish backwards causing its huge gills to flair, adding additional weight.

Mieke worked the heavy rod and reel from the back of the boat while I worked from the front.

On the third pass, Mieke's rod jerked violently as she did her best to get good footing in the boat and to horse the fish in.

When the fish finally surfaced, it was hooked in the tail and it did not like being pulled through the water backwards. As the fish approached the boat, Marlyn grabbed the fish by its oversized mouth and hoisted it into the boat. Now it was decision time as the fish was below the 35- to 45-inch slot keeper, but not a terribly large one, but one Mieke would need to make a decision about, as she had to decide to keep or to release the fish and try for a larger one.

Marlyn of course as he usually does, gave her a bad time, letting her know, fishing had been tough and it may be the only fish she may catch.

I could see by the "what am I doing" look on her face as she dropped the fish back in the water, she had doubts about catching another fish.

On the next pass, a few feet of the bow, a larger Paddlefish came out of the water, a good sign that the fish she had taken earlier was not the only fish in the hole.

Making the turn on the second pass, her rod bent over, as her hook connected with another paddlefish, one that rolled on the surface just off the shoreline.

Rearing back on the rod, she cranked on the reel hard and with each revolution of the reel handle, she would gain a foot or so of line.

As the fish approached the boat, it was a larger fish

then the one she released, when Marlyn reached for the fish, he noticed a shiny piece of jewelry protruding from its lip, as Mieke had not only landed a larger fish, she had also landed one which was tagged.

It did not take Mieke long to decide if she would keep this fish as once it was in the boat; she put her tag on it.

Now it was my turn and after three or four trips through the hole, I was wondering if we might have blown out the hole, spooking the remaining fish downstream.

No sooner had we made the turn, when I was pulled violently backwards as my 2/0 hook connected with a fish. Holding the long rod high, I cranked hard on the handle, working the fish towards the boat. As the fish broke water, off the stern of the boat, it appeared to be another fish under the 35-inch slot one that would soon be adorned with my Nebraska tag.

Just two more passes later, I hooked into our fourth fish of the day, one that looked as if it would look good wearing my South Dakota tag.

Marlyn had pulled it off again, in two short hours; we had boated four paddlefish, taken dozens of photos and had lunch, drawing to a close, another excellent family outing and the 2014 paddlefish season.

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 in the Yankton area on local channels 2 & 98 Saturday at 6:30 pm and Sunday at 7 a.m., and on MIDCO Sports Network Thursday at 5:30 p.m. and Sunday at 10 a.m. In Northwest Iowa, Southeast South Dakota and Northeast Nebraska it airs on Siouxland CW 4.2 Sunday at 9 a.m. He and Simon Fuller Co-Host the Outdoor Adventures radio program on Classic Hits 106.3, ESPN Sports Radio 1570 in Southeastern South Dakota and Northeast Nebraska. In Northwest Iowa, it airs on KCHE 92.1 FM. If you are looking for more outdoor information, check out www.outdoorsmenadventures.com and like Outdoorsmen Adventures on Facebook.

OUTDOORS DIGEST

Many Furbearer Seasons Under Way

PIERRE — As of Nov. 1, many of the furbearer seasons across the state began.

The South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks Department (GFP) wants to remind individuals to leave trapping equipment or furbearers in traps undisturbed.

Tampering with either one is a violation. "Trapping is a recreational opportunity enjoyed by sportsmen and women across the state," said Keith Fisk, GFP wildlife damage program administrator. "Our agency is reminding individuals who come across trapping equipment or furbearers in traps to not disturb the animals and equipment as the trapper will be checking the traps in accordance with state regulations."

Traps (including snares) are designed to humanely hold furbearers. When individuals voluntarily shoot a furbearer in a trap thinking they are assisting the trapper; they oftentimes destroy valuable pelts which can lead to conflicts.

"Dispatching furbearers in traps is best left to the individual operating the devices," said Fisk.

In 2013, 2,463 sportsmen and women pursued the renewable natural resource of wild fur as a recreational outdoor activity. Trapping is an important component of wildlife management and serves as a critical role in managing South Dakota's furbearer populations.

Nebraska Hunters Urged To Find Check Stations

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — Nebraska Game and Parks officials are urging hunters to find check stations before going out to find deer after the firearm hunting season opens on Saturday.

The commission says the list of check stations has changed since it was first printed.

During the firearm season, hunters must deliver their deer to check stations no later than 1 p.m. on Nov. 24, which is the day after the Nov. 23 season close.

An updated list of check stations is available online at OutdoorNebraska.org.

Two Nebraska Programs Set Up To Aid Deer Donations

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — Nebraska Game and Parks is reminding hunters about two programs that are aimed at supporting hunters' donations of deer carcasses.

The first is Hunters Helping the Hungry, which is supported by cash donations so it can pay for the handling of field-dressed deer carcasses taken to any program processor. The second is the Deer Exchange. The free program doesn't pay for processing, but it does connect hunters with people who have signed up for the free venison. Hunters and the people receiving the deer may agree to share the processing costs.

Information about both programs can be found online at www.outdoormebraska.org/hunting/programs.asp.

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