

OUTDOORS DIGEST

Of The Outdoors | Gary Howey

Prospects Look Good For Neb. Pheasant Season

LINCOLN, Neb. – Upland game hunters across Nebraska will have improved prospects during this year's pheasant season, which opens Oct. 31. Pheasant numbers are 55 percent higher than last year.

Nebraska's weather has been kind to the state's upland game this year. The state has experienced relatively mild winters recently, which has aided over-winter survival of pheasants. The more pheasants – particularly hens – that survive the winter, the larger the breeding stock is for the breeding season.

The favorable spring weather this year allowed pheasant populations to increase in relatively short order. Rainfall this past spring appears to not have occurred during the sensitive phases of the nesting and brood-rearing periods; chicks during the first week or so of life cannot regulate their own body temperatures and have low survival if they become wet and catch a chill.

The timely spring rainfall also produced abundant vegetation, which in turn produced abundant insects. The insects provide chicks with food they need to grow and develop into healthy adult birds. Having adequate nutrition during development can result in healthier adult birds and possibly increase their survival through the winter. The vegetation also provided ample habitat for nesting and for brood-rearing, which had been lacking.

Surveys this year have indicated that pheasant abundance was higher in all regions of the state compared to 2014. The southwest and Panhandle regions should offer the best hunting opportunities this year, but better opportunities should be available statewide.

The season runs through Jan. 31, 2016. The entire state is open to pheasant hunting, although no hunting is allowed on state refuges and sanctuaries. Only rooster pheasants may be harvested. The daily bag limit is three and the possession limit is 12.

Quail season dates are the same as for pheasant. Surveys have indicated increases in abundance of quail compared to 2014 across almost all of the quail's range. Habitat conditions were excellent for production and brood-rearing across the state. The southeast and south central parts of the state should offer the best opportunities this year, but there will be good opportunities throughout quail range.

Two Missouri River Boat Ramps Will Be Built In NE Nebraska

LINCOLN, Neb. – Missouri River boaters in northeast Nebraska will have two new ramps to launch from by next spring, one at Ponca State Park (SP) and another at Mulberry Bend Wildlife Management Area (WMA). The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission will begin work soon at both sites in Dixon County.

A new concrete boat ramp and parking area will be built on Elk Point Bend on the northwest edge of Ponca SP. The work site will be closed to public access during construction, which will begin with rock rip-rap delivery and bank grading.

An existing boat ramp at Mulberry Bend WMA, located north of Newcaste, was damaged by the 2011 Missouri River flood. A longer concrete ramp will be built in its place, and new bank stabilization will be installed. The new facility will be handicap accessible and include walkways and a restroom.

A small, temporary launch site will be available at Mulberry Bend WMA, but parking will be limited. The old boat ramp will be closed to public access while repairs are being done starting in November. Boaters and duck hunters should use an alternate boat ramp located 5 miles upstream west of Vermilion in Clay County, South Dakota.

State Park Director Eams Division, State Awards

MITCHELL – The South Dakota Division of Parks and Recreation director Doug Hofer was recently recognized for his leadership and contributions to recreation in South Dakota.

Hofer received the Division of Parks and Recreation's Distinguished Service Award and the South Dakota Parks and Recreation Association's (SDPRA) Hall of Fame Award at the groups' annual meetings held earlier this month.

Employees who embody the mission of the state park system are selected for the Division's Distinguished Service honor. The SDPRA Hall of Fame Award is given to individuals who have made an outstanding contribution to the parks and recreation field in South Dakota.

In the last 30 years under director Hofer, the state park's system's reliance on state general funds has decreased from over 50 percent to eight percent.

Division of Parks & Rec Honors Employees

MITCHELL – The South Dakota Division of Parks and Recreation recently recognized several individuals for their dedication and hard work in the state parks system. The awards were made at the division's fall meeting in Mitchell.

Doug Hofer of Pierre and Lori Skadsen of Grenville received 2015 South Dakota State Parks Distinguished Service Awards. South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks employees who embody the mission of the state park system are selected for the honor. Hofer has served as state park director for nearly 30 years. Pickerel Lake park manager Lori Skadsen has dedicated 35 years to the division.

Emilie Miller of Pierre received an Award of Appreciation. Miller is a program specialist. She manages the parks' volunteer program and coordinates special events across the state.

Teamwork Awards were presented to two different groups. The first, to the staff involved with cleanup efforts at Farm Island and West Bend Recreation Areas. A June 22 storm caused major damage at both parks, but the crew had the main park areas functional in time for weekend campers.

The second teamwork award recognized park employees involved in two major Black Hills tourist events. The 50th Annual Buffalo Roundup and the 75th Annual Sturgis Rally both brought record crowds into Custer State Park. Managing these large crowds required coordination and assistance from everyone available.

Early Pheasant Hunting Tactics

BY GARY HOWEY

Hartington, Neb.

For those of us who have counted the days until the pheasant opener, your wait is up!

Reports indicate that the pheasant numbers in Iowa, Nebraska, Minnesota and South Dakota are up, these states are really crowing about their increase in pheasant numbers.

The mild winter and decent spring, as well as some improvements in habitat have helped to bring pheasant numbers back up.

I have hunted pheasants in the upper Midwest most of my life and especially in South Dakota, as that was where I grew up. If you are looking at pheasant hunting in South Dakota, you will not need to worry, as the number of birds in the state, their state bird, the Chinese ringneck pheasant are unbelievable and there are more birds there than anywhere I have ever hunted.

Over the years, I have hunted with hundreds of hunters and was surprised how some went charging into the field with no plan and at times, "No Clue." Then there were those, who amazed me, these hunters looked each field over, hashed things over and made a plan, before heading into the field, approaching each field differently.

Here are a few tips that I have learned over the years helping me to become a more consistent pheasant hunter.

Once you arrive at the field you plan on hunting, keep the noise to a minimum as all wild game has a very acute sense of hearing. This means, do not slam your car door and you will need to keep your dog under control.

If you use a whistle to control your dog, do not keep blowing on it, as this will surely put the birds on alert, as the blast of a loud whistle is a foreign sound to them. If you need to use a whistle, try using a hawk call as it is a familiar sound and many times when



PHOTO: GARY HOWEY

By taking your time, working from side to side and pausing from time to time, your hunting success during the early season will be more productive.

the birds hear it, they will hunker down, allowing you to get closer before they burst from the cover.

Let your dog do the hunting, follow him wherever he leads you, as his sense of smell is the key to locating the birds.

In the early season, you will run into many young birds, which hold tight, allowing you to get close enough for a shot, so you will not need a heavy load, as you would during the late season. Six shot is a good load to use at this time of the year and as the season progresses you may want to go with heavier loads.

I go with a 5 shot year round as I hunt from the opener until the end of the season and the 5 shot works throughout the year.

Even though it's early season, take your time hunting, as there is no need to rush.

Work your way through the field, walking from side to side when working your way through the field. Pheasants are runners; they will run off to the side of a hunter sitting tight until you pass. By working back and forth,

you and the other hunters with you will eventually force those running birds into the air.

Stop occasionally so your dog can work the area, if you aren't hunting with a dog, it is still a good idea to stop as this makes those birds hunkered down around you nervous, thinking they have been spotted, forcing them into the air.

Use wingmen and blockers, as even early season birds will run ahead of the hunters. Wingmen should be 15 to 20 yards ahead of the walkers on either side and blockers will need to spread out at the end of the field you are hunting.

Blockers need to approach the end of the field quietly, getting into position well before the walkers start moving.

Make every effort to find downed birds. Other hunters in the group should spot for the hunter and dogs searching for the bird, guiding them into the general area the bird went down, arrowing the search area, making it easier to locate downed birds.

Think safety first! Be sure you

know where the other hunters are.

Everyone in your hunting party should wear hunters orange, as it makes it much easier for others to see you and in many states and it is the law.

Use the Blue Sky method and do not shoot at anything not high enough for you to see Blue Sky under the bird.

Never shoot at a bird on the ground, as many times a hunting dog will be right behind the bird. Call the bird so other hunters will know if it is a hen or rooster.

Much of the success when hunting early season depends on how much unpicked corn remains in the field. If there is corn still standing in the fields, you can bet that that is the first place the birds will go once the first shot goes off.

At one time, it was an easy task to walk the corn as the rows were wide, weedy and the corn was short. These days, rows are narrow, clean and over six foot tall. If you hunt corn during the early season and you want to get a shot, you best be either a wingman or blocker.

Those hunters pushing through the corn are just going to be drivers, driving the birds in front of them to the wingmen and blockers.

I hope that we will all have a successful and safe pheasant-hunting season, see you in the field!

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. It airs on Saturdays at 6:30 am and on the MIDCO Sports Network Thursday at 5:30 pm and Sunday at 10:00 am. The show can be seen 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 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 Gary Howey's *Outdoorsmen Adventures* on Facebook.

Dokken: There's Something About A Campfire

BY BRAD DOKKEN

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(Grand Forks, N.D.)

There's something about a campfire that never gets old, that makes old people feel young again and spans generations.

What that something is, I can't really say for sure, but it's true.

There's something about a campfire.

I thought about that the other night when a friend and his kindergarten-age son joined me for an overnight stay at the getaway in northern Minnesota. We'd spent the better part of a gorgeous October day in a boat, and the fish had cooperated.

That was all fine and good, but the kid was much more excited about the campfire.

He likes campfires, his dad said.

That was obvious. We'd barely gotten out of the truck when the boy made a beeline for the woodpile. He'd done his time in the boat. Now it was time to dance around the fire, eat more s'mores than Mom ever would allow him to consume and hang with the grown-ups for an evening.

That's not such a bad thing when you're a

kindergartner, but the time inevitably will come when hanging with the grown-ups won't be a priority, at least for a few years.

Someday, a long time from now, he'll realize what a treat it was to hang by a campfire with the grown-ups.

There's a lot of history that's gone down around the Fire Pit, as we call the campfire gathering place. The rocks that form the fire ring were hand-hewn by my great-grandfather, a Norwegian immigrant who homesteaded the place more than a century ago. At one time, the rocks were part of the foundation of the old house that stood as the centerpiece of the homestead.

The house is gone now, only a small rise in the yard betrays it ever existed, but a few of the hand-hewn rocks survive _ a nod to the people that settled here.

It's fitting, I think, to use them as the foundation for the Fire Pit.

Fall, of course, is prime campfire time at the Fire Pit. The mosquitoes are gone, the days are cool and the sounds of Canada geese flying overhead regularly fill the air.

It's the time of year when a blazing fire feels good.

Braggin' Board

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Dave (last name not provided) of Las Vegas, Nevada, caught this Paddlefish.



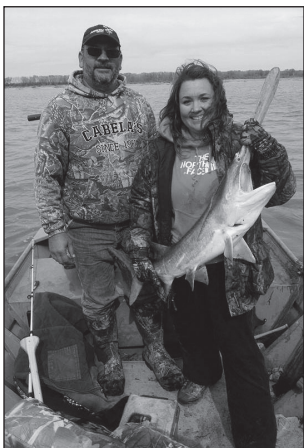
Rod McCloud caught his limit of Crappies.



Jeremy and Jodi Kneifl of Hartington, Neb., caught these two Paddlefish.



Mike Hood of Yankton caught these two 4-pound Walleyes and this 3-pound Saugeye.



Jim and Shauna Dooley of Hartington, Neb., caught this Paddlefish.



Kourtney Christensen recently shot this Elk.

TROPHY SPOTLIGHT



PHOTO: CAPTAIN NORM'S
Anna Skroch from Bloomfield, Nebraska, caught this 60-pound, 47-inch paddlefish on Oct. 24.



PHOTO: CAPTAIN NORM'S
Steve Jarchow from Beatrice, Nebraska, caught this 75-pound, 50-inch paddlefish on Oct. 23.

Turn In Poachers Benefits S.D. Wildlife

PIERRE – The Game, Fish and Parks Department is reminding citizens that the South Dakota Turn In Poachers (TIPs) program continues to be operational and callers who have knowledge of illegal hunting and fishing activity could be eligible for rewards. The program provides an important avenue for citizens to report hunting and fishing law violations, and in the process, prevent the loss of wildlife that can result from illegal actions.

"In the annual reporting period from July 1, 2014, through June 30, 2015, the TIPs program resulted in 126 arrests of wildlife law violators," GFP law program administrator Andy Alban said. "Wildlife would have been lost and violators would have gone unpunished if citizens had not been proactive by calling the TIPs hotline and reporting violations they had observed."

During the past year, the TIPs program reported 213 investigations initiated through citizen reports, leading to 126 arrests, \$18,558 in fines and \$30,100 in civil penalties.

Callers can remain anonymous, and are eligible for rewards in cases that lead to an arrest. Rewards may range up to \$300 for big game and \$100 for small game or fishing violations. Higher rewards may be offered in extreme cases. Last year over \$5,000 in rewards were paid.

"The TIPs program has been going since 1984, and in that time citizens have generated over 10,000 investigations that have led to 3,700 arrests," Alban said. "We are grateful to the men and women who have cared enough about South Dakota's wildlife to report illegal activity. Each and every individual is a vital part of the work to preserve our natural resources."

Individuals may call the TIPs hotline at 1.888.OVER-BAG (683-7224) to report violations, or report via the TIPs website at tips.sd.gov.

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