

2012 Annual Report



**Nebraska
Game and Parks
Commission**

2012 Annual Report

Nebraska Game and Parks Commission
2200 North 33rd Street • Lincoln, Nebraska • 68503-0370
402-471-0641
www.OutdoorNebraska.org

**All photos (unless noted) courtesy of *NEBRASKAland Magazine*, published by the
Nebraska Game and Parks Commission since 1926**

Copyright © 2013
All rights reserved

Printed on recycled paper with soy ink

**Cover: Cloaked in early morning light and fog, the Niobrara River evokes nature's ethereal beauty
and mystery as it flows through Cherry County. Photo by Bob Grier.**

The Commission

Chairman

Ron Stave, Waterloo

Vice Chairman

Norris Marshall, Kearney

2nd Vice Chairman

Jerrold Burke, Curtis

Lynn Berggren, Broken Bow

Rex Fisher, Omaha

Dr. Kent Forney, Lincoln

Dr. Mark Pinkerton, Wilber

Mark Spurgin, Paxton

Mick Jensen, Blair

Director

Jim Douglas, 402-471-5539

Deputy Director

Tim McCoy, 402-471-5537

For Further Information...

This report represents the highlights of activities and events of the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission during the calendar year 2012.

Complete division reports with further information and detail are available by contacting these administrators (402 area code):

Budget and Fiscal

Patrick Cole, 402-471-5523

Engineering

Chris Lemke, 402-471-5557

Fisheries

Don Gabelhouse, 402-471-5515

Information and Education

Christy Rasmussen, 402-471-5593

Information Technology

Toni Knust, 402-471-5549

Law Enforcement

Craig Stover, 402-471-5532

Operations and Construction

Earl Johnson, 402-471-5525

Parks

Roger Kuhn, 402-471-5512

Personnel

Angela Janda-Craig, 402-471-5453

Environmental Services

Frank Albrecht, 402-471-5422

Gene Zuerlein, 402-471-1542

Wildlife

Scott Taylor, 402-471-5439

The Offices

Headquarters and Southeast District

2200 N. 33rd St. / P.O. Box 30370
Lincoln, NE 68503-0370
402-471-0641 / Fax 402-471-5528

Omaha Metro

1212 Bob Gibson Blvd.
Omaha, NE 68108-2020
402-595-2144 / Fax 402-595-2569

Northwest District

299 Husker Rd. / P.O. Box 725
Alliance, NE 69301-0725
308-763-2940
Fax 308-763-2943

Bassett Service Center

524 Panzer St., P.O. Box 508
Bassett, NE 68714-0934
402-684-2921/Fax 402-684-2816

Northeast District

2201 N. 13th St.
Norfolk, NE 68701-2267
402-370-3374 / Fax 402-370-3256

Southwest District

301 E. State Farm Rd.
North Platte, NE 69101-0430
308-535-8025 / Fax 308-535-8028

Kearney Service Center

1617 First Ave.
Kearney, NE 68847-6057
308-865-5310 / Fax 308-865-5309

Visit us at

www.OutdoorNebraska.org

Canada geese take flight at Lake
Minatare State Recreation Area.

PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER



From the Director



Dear Governor Heineman and Members of the Legislature:

Nebraska's natural treasures, rich outdoor heritage and recreational opportunities are vital to our state. They connect people to the natural world and are major economic drivers. Nebraska Game and Parks Board of Commissioners and staff are committed to providing services and opportunities that preserve Nebraska's outdoor heritage. Our 2012 Annual Report will show the agency's resolve to be a steward for the state's wildlife and parkland resources.

Outdoor pursuits have an estimated \$1.7 billion economic impact in Nebraska. 2012 was a year of success for economic contributions and in many other ways. People bought more park and fishing permits than in 2011 and enjoyed our lakes and state park system. We had even more successes. Two of our new programs helped the youth and fed the hungry of this state. We proactively educated Nebraskans about conservation efforts, issues affecting wildlife, habitats and invasive species. We introduced thousands to the outdoors and enhanced people's outdoor skills.

Through collaboration and innovation, we overcame some major challenges in 2012. Our workforce integration system enabled dedicated staff to tackle the devastating wildfires in the Pine Ridge and north-central Nebraska that affected some of our park and wildlife areas. An outbreak of epizootic hemorrhagic disease decreased our white-tailed deer herd, resulting in our adjusting the number of antlerless-only deer permits available. Staff educated Nebraskans about the disease and the impacts on wildlife.

Game and Parks manages wildlife and park resources so residents and visitors alike will continue to find Nebraska to be a jewel of outdoor recreation.

Sincerely,

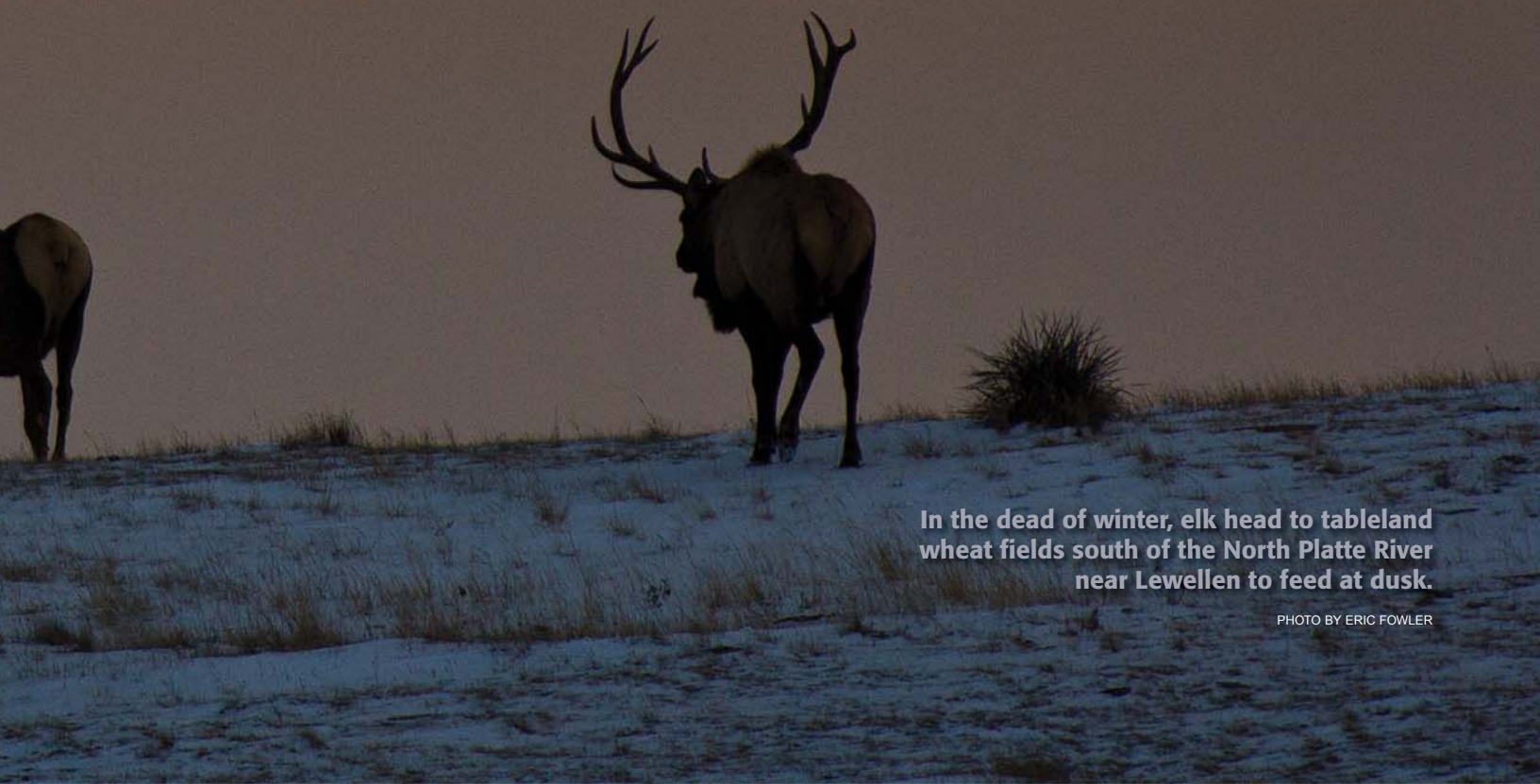
A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "James M. Douglas".

Jim Douglas
Director



“ Our mission is stewardship of the state’s fish, wildlife, parks and outdoor recreation resources in the best long-term interests of the people and those resources. ”

To accomplish that purpose, Game and Parks strives to plan and implement its policies and programs efficiently and objectively; maintain a rich and diverse environment in Nebraska’s lands and waters; provide outdoor recreation opportunities; manage wildlife resources for the maximum benefit of the people, and strive to help Nebraskans appreciate their roles in the natural world.



In the dead of winter, elk head to tableland wheat fields south of the North Platte River near Lewellen to feed at dusk.

PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER

Financial Report

The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission is predominately self-funded, receiving approximately 15 percent of its total 2012 funding from the State General Fund. Fourteen additional cash/federal funds have been established for agency use:

- 1) Game Fund
- 2) Park Fund
- 3) Direct Federal Fund
- 4) Voluntary Public Access Federal Fund
- 5) Habitat Fund
- 6) Nebraska Outdoor Recreational Development Act (NORDA) Fund
- 7) Recreational Trails Federal Fund
- 8) Aquatic Habitat Fund
- 9) Wildlife Conservation Fund
- 10) Game Law Investigation Fund
- 11) Cowboy Trail Fund
- 12) Youth Conservation Program Fund
- 13) Nebraska Snowmobile Trail Fund

While most of the fund names are self-descriptive, a few of the more critical warrant further explanation.

General Fund – This is supported by money collected by the Nebraska Department of Revenue, deposited with the State Treasurer and appropriated by the Legislature. General Fund money is appropriated to Game and Parks for those operating activities that are:

- 1) not self-supporting (primarily operations of the state park system and nongame and

endangered species activities);

- 2) administrative activities that are general in nature, applicable to the entire agency and difficult to prorate among the various other funding sources; and

- 3) activities that extend beyond the statutory use of the various cash funds.

Game Fund – This derives its revenues from a variety of sources, including hunting and fishing permit sales, Federal Aid reimbursements and interest earnings. This fund is the largest source of funding for the agency and serves as the primary funding source for fish and wildlife activities.

Park Fund – This is the second largest source of funding to the agency. It is used to improve, maintain and operate areas within the state park system. Major revenue sources include camping and lodging fees, park entry permit sales, restaurant and food services and other park facility use fees.

Federal Grants – These are the third largest cash funding sources for the agency. They include reimbursable and direct grants.

Habitat Funds – These include terrestrial and aquatic funds. They are supported primarily from the sale of the stamps tied to hunting and fishing activities, respectively.

Nebraska Outdoor Recreational Development Act Fund – This is restricted to the development, operation and maintenance of areas of the state park

system. The primary source of revenue is the Nebraska Tobacco Products Tax. The portion of the tax earmarked for NORDA is the equivalent of one cent on a conventional package of cigarettes. This fund is critical to the development and maintenance of the state park buildings and amenities infrastructure.



Bighorn sheep rams browse and bed on a hillside at Fort Robinson State Park.

PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER

Details of Major Expenditure Sources

Parks, Engineering and Construction Divisions

This includes administration and operations of state parks, state recreation areas, state historical parks, state recreation trails, and related engineering and construction services.

Funding sources include: Park Cash Fund, \$15,447,602.81 (62 percent); General Fund, \$8,274,069.10 (33); Youth Conservation Program Fund, \$920,732.90 (4); NORDA, \$77,971.78 (1); federal funds, \$146,391.90 (1); Cowboy Trail Fund, \$41,151.92 (less than 1).

Wildlife Division

This includes administration and operations of wildlife management areas (WMA), private lands habitat work, game and nongame species activities and associated engineering services.

Funding sources include: Game Cash Fund, \$5,277,819.20 (33 percent); Habitat Fund, \$5,282,716.57 (33); federal funds, \$4,628,202.83 (29); General Fund, \$585,087.45 (4); Wildlife Conservation Fund, \$203,993.39 (1); Hunters Helping the Hungry Fund, \$16,326.95 (less than 1).

Fisheries Division

This includes administration and operations of fish hatcheries, Ak-Sar-Ben Aquarium, public and private waters

2012 Revenue Sources (total = \$74.1 million)



2012 Expenditure Sources (total = \$72.2 million)



fisheries resource management and associated engineering services.

Funding sources include: Game Cash Fund, \$5,003,695.76 (66 percent); federal funds, \$2,379,026.90 (31); General Fund, \$98,376.52 (1); Aquatic Habitat Fund, \$87,947.81 (1).

Law Enforcement Division

This includes fish, wildlife, park and boating law enforcement, as well as public educational programs associated with hunter education and resource use.

Funding sources include: Game Cash Fund, \$3,384,946.07 (71 percent); General Fund, \$866,096.89 (18); Park Cash Fund, \$530,236.57 (11); federal funds, \$8,000 (less than 1).

Administration Division

This includes administrative activities associated with the director’s office, the Personnel, Realty, Environmental Services, Budget and Fiscal, Information Technology divisions, district offices, Federal Aid, board of commissioners, and credit card processing, as well as associated engineering services.

Funding sources include: Game Cash Fund, \$3,019,451.89 (59 percent); Park

Sale of Surplus Property .1 M (<1%)
 Miscellaneous .6 M (1%)
 Publication Related .4 M (1%)
 Land Use Leases .4 M (1%)
 Resale Items .6 M (1%)
 Boat Registrations 1 M (1%)
 Food Services .9 M (1%)
 Tobacco Products Tax 1.3 M (2%)
 Investment Income 1.3 M (2%)
 Concessions and Admissions 2 M (3%)
 Donations 2.1 M (3%)



2012 Permits and Stamps Sold

Permit or Stamp	2011*	2012*	Change
Resident fishing	101,238	118,569	17%
Resident hunting	28,217	25,549	-9%
Resident hunting/fishing	33,548	33,820	1%
Resident hunting/fishing, veteran	4,333	5,130	18%
Resident hunting/fishing, senior	7,890	9,593	22%
Nonresident hunting/fishing	583	648	11%
Resident 1-day fishing	13,282	15,123	14%
Nonresident 1-day fishing	16,395	18,974	16%
Nonresident 2-day hunting	2,827	3,091	9%
Nonresident fishing	5,573	6,367	14%
Nonresident hunting	11,558	10,166	-12%
Resident 3-day fishing	826	808	-2%
Nonresident 3-day fishing	6,691	7,416	11%
Aquatic stamp	148,459	167,628	13%
Migratory waterfowl stamp	33,532	31,779	-5%
Resident fur harvest	6,709	8,288	24%
Habitat stamp	130,331	123,261	-5%
Annual park	131,662	139,924	6%
Daily park	224,281	241,866	8%
Duplicate park	60,968	65,800	8%
Nonresident youth hunt	799	690	-14%
TOTAL	969,702	1,034,490	7%
Lifetime hunting, fishing, stamp	3,717	4,027	8%
Total big game	193,154	176,004	-9%
Total paddlefish	1,601	1,875	17%
TOTAL Lifetime, big game, paddlefish	198,472	181,906	-8%
TOTAL Permits, Stamps	1,168,174	1,216,396	4%

* Quantity totals = data recorded as of Dec. 31 of calendar year.

Cash Fund, \$1,147,155 (22); General Fund, \$824,641.67 (16); Habitat Fund, \$129,548.80 (3); federal funds, \$15 (less than 1); Aquatic Habitat Fund, \$45 (less than 1).

Information and Education Division

This includes all communication and outreach initiatives, such as administration and operations of all communication and outreach initiatives such as *NEBRASKAland Magazine*, agency printing, multimedia news releases, advertising and public awareness campaigns, as well as boating administration, boating law enforcement, boating education, hunter education and shooting range development.

Funding sources include: Game Cash Fund, \$3,018,318.55 (85 percent); Park Cash Fund, \$533,551.37 (15); federal funds, \$32.65 (less than 1).

Capital Construction

This includes capital construction activities on state parks, state recreation areas, state trails, state historical parks, WMAs, state fish hatcheries and acquisition of lands for WMA or park purposes, as well as some grant pass-through for community trails and Land and Water Conservation Fund program projects.

Funding sources include: Aquatic Habitat Fund, \$5,129,287.50 (50 percent); federal funds, \$2,872,711.77 (28); NORDA, \$1,342,758.33 (13); Game Cash Fund, \$589,130.11 (6); Park Cash Fund, \$121,902.95 (1); Habitat Fund, \$54,814.44 (1); General Fund, \$32,750 (less than 1); Cowboy Trail Fund, \$19,915.85 (less than 1).

Horseback trail rides take visitors to Niobrara State Park on a tour of the hills above the confluence of the Missouri and Niobrara rivers.

PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER



Park and Recreation Areas

Parks Use

Campgrounds enjoyed a substantial increase in use in 2012 because of an early spring and continued warm weather into the summer. Camper registrations were up 35 percent during March, April and May, compared to 2011. Park Permit sales were up more than 7.5 percent even though

permit prices increased from \$20 to \$25 at the start of 2012.

Recreational pursuits declined slightly during July and August because of high temperatures, lack of rain and increasing pressure for irrigation. Irrigation reservoirs were drawn down to record or near-record levels and boating access became limited to impractical at some lakes. Lake recovery is slow because of the lack of rain and minimal snow fall. Flood control impoundments lost water to evaporation and have yet to recover to conservation pool levels.



**The sun sets on a camp at the water's edge
at Lake McConaughy State Recreation Area.**

PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER

Lake Wanahoo SRA Opens

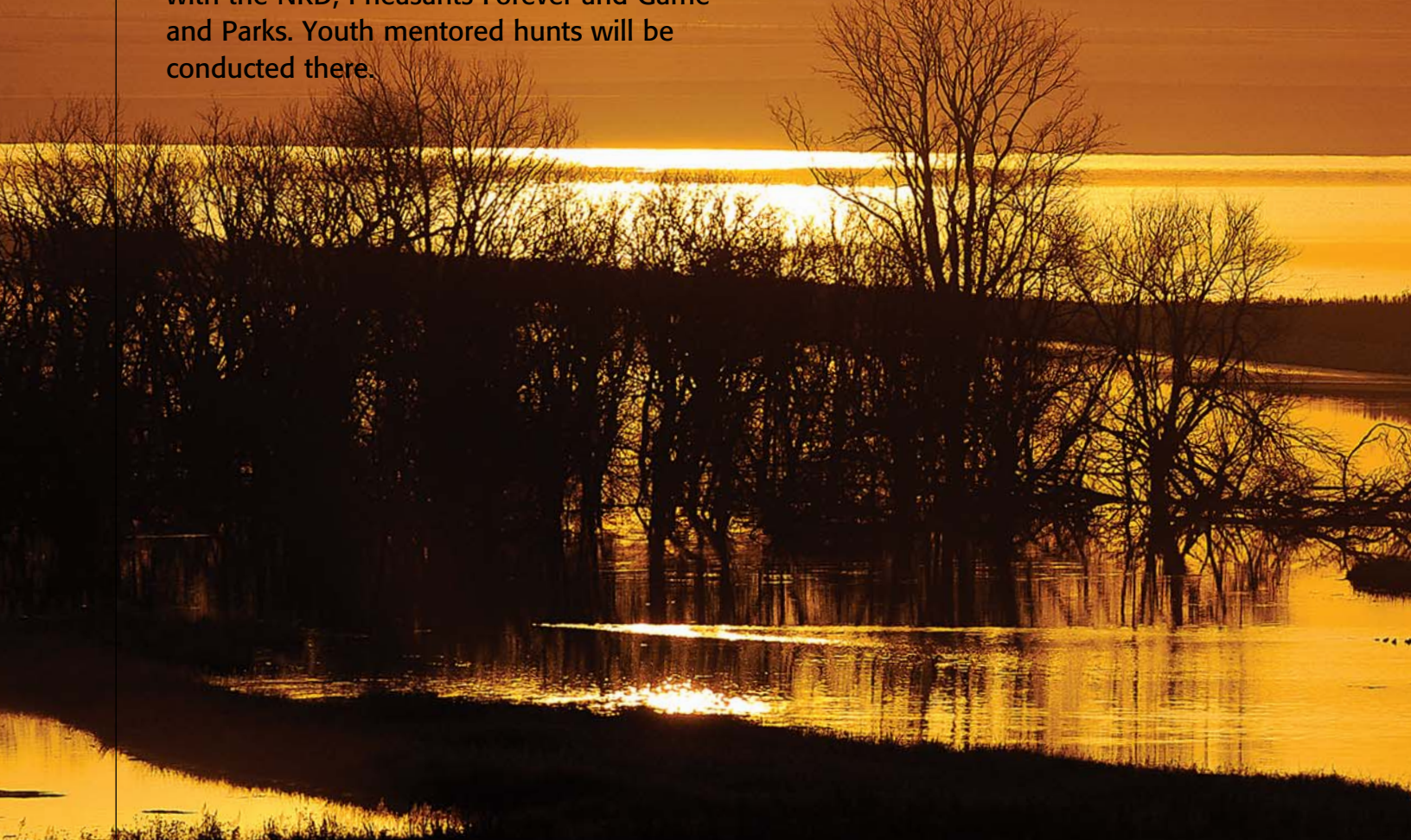
Our newest state recreation area opened to the public in April 2012. The 660-acre lake was built by the Lower Platte North Natural Resources District (NRD) for flood control on the Sand Creek watershed. Game and Parks entered into an agreement to manage the recreation resources. The south portion of the area offers more than 130 campsites, picnic shelters, a boat ramp, hiking trails and fishing. The area north of the breakwater is managed for wildlife habitat through a cooperative agreement with the NRD, Pheasants Forever and Game and Parks. Youth mentored hunts will be conducted there.

Mahoney State Park Cabin Renovation

Work continued on cabin renovations by the Operations and Construction Division with 11 standard cabins being completed. This project included expanding floor space for additional living and dining rooms, addition of Murphy beds, improved decks, high efficiency heating and cooling systems and new fireplaces.

Great Park Pursuit

For the fifth year, Game and Parks partnered with the Nebraska Recreation and Park Association and Nebraska Health



and Human Services to put on the Great Park Pursuit. The goal is to encourage a healthier lifestyle while increasing awareness of Nebraska's outdoor recreation opportunities by encouraging park visits. In 2012, there were 2,234 participants from eight states and 164 communities.

Mahoney State Park Food Service

Restaurant and eating services were rebid at the Peter Kiewit Lodge as per the Parks Division restructuring plan and were awarded to Jeff and Emily Parker, operating as the Mahoney Grille. Privatization allows the Parks Division to reduce the size of the agency workforce and trim operational

expenses associated with the day-to-day operations of food service.

State Parks Mobile Application Available

The Information Technology Division led an integrated work group and released the first mobile application for Nebraska State Parks and Trails. Features of the application available include locating parks by region, by name or by activities offered. The advanced GPS functions search for parks nearby and will record tracks and mark waypoints. The free application is available for iPhone and Android devices.

The sun rises over Lake Wanahoo on a fall morning. The lake opened to the public in April 2012.

PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER

Law Enforcement at Park Areas

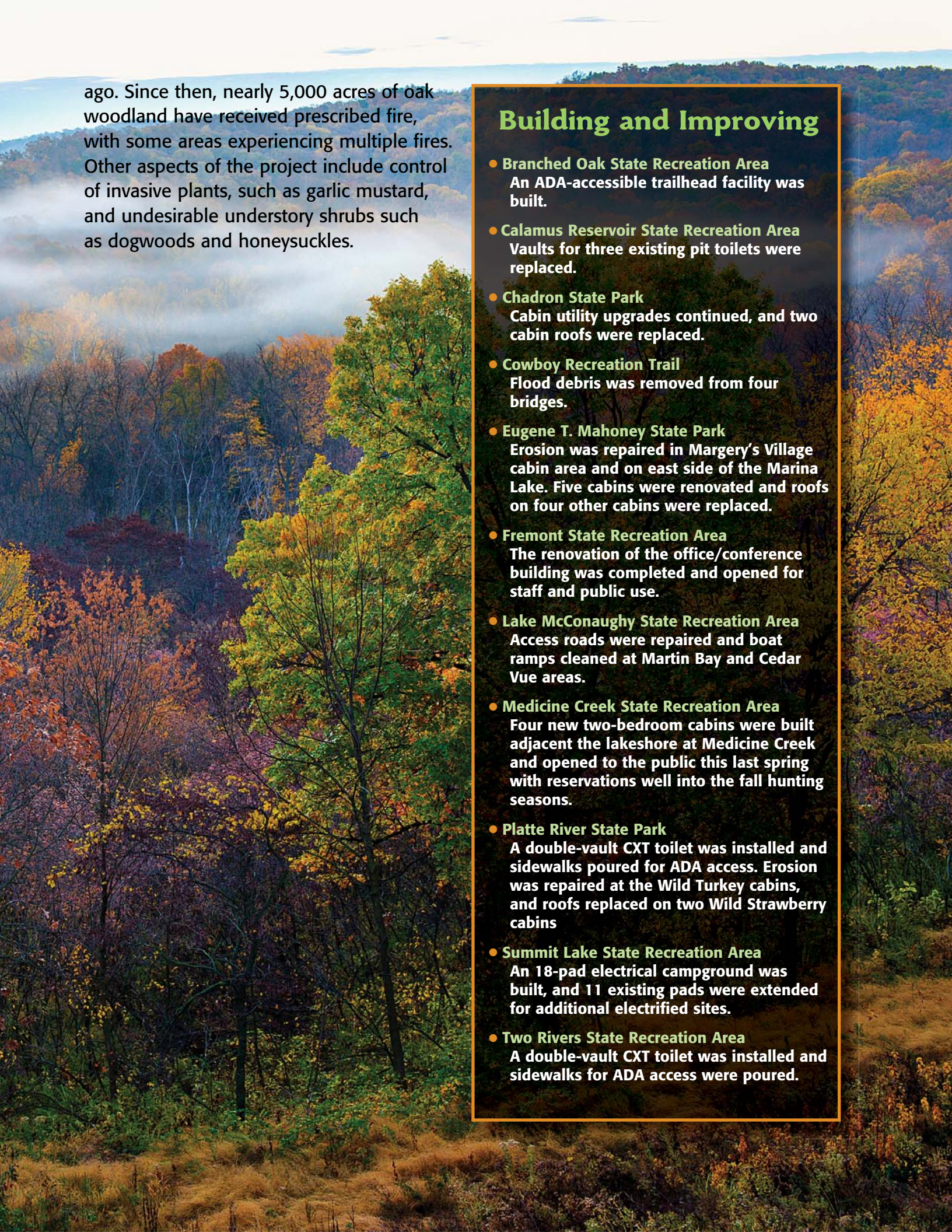
Warm and dry conditions early in the year resulted in increased visitor activity at state park areas. Because of this extended season, conservation officer contacts with park visitors rose 25 percent from 2011. Park, boating and fishing enforcement rose 14 percent, resulting in 31 percent more park violations, 12 percent more boating violations and 19 percent more fishing violations.

Indian Cave State Park Habitat Improvement

With assistance from Wildlife Division and Northern Prairies Land Trust staff, the Parks Division completed four prescribed burns totaling more than 2,000 acres of oak woodland at Indian Cave State Park in the winter of 2012. The burns represent the most important component of a habitat restoration project that began three years

Fog rising from the Missouri River wafts up the forested bluffs at Indian Cave State Park on a fall morning.

PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER



ago. Since then, nearly 5,000 acres of oak woodland have received prescribed fire, with some areas experiencing multiple fires. Other aspects of the project include control of invasive plants, such as garlic mustard, and undesirable understory shrubs such as dogwoods and honeysuckles.

Building and Improving

- **Branched Oak State Recreation Area**
An ADA-accessible trailhead facility was built.
- **Calamus Reservoir State Recreation Area**
Vaults for three existing pit toilets were replaced.
- **Chadron State Park**
Cabin utility upgrades continued, and two cabin roofs were replaced.
- **Cowboy Recreation Trail**
Flood debris was removed from four bridges.
- **Eugene T. Mahoney State Park**
Erosion was repaired in Margery's Village cabin area and on east side of the Marina Lake. Five cabins were renovated and roofs on four other cabins were replaced.
- **Fremont State Recreation Area**
The renovation of the office/conference building was completed and opened for staff and public use.
- **Lake McConaughy State Recreation Area**
Access roads were repaired and boat ramps cleaned at Martin Bay and Cedar Vue areas.
- **Medicine Creek State Recreation Area**
Four new two-bedroom cabins were built adjacent the lakeshore at Medicine Creek and opened to the public this last spring with reservations well into the fall hunting seasons.
- **Platte River State Park**
A double-vault CXT toilet was installed and sidewalks poured for ADA access. Erosion was repaired at the Wild Turkey cabins, and roofs replaced on two Wild Strawberry cabins
- **Summit Lake State Recreation Area**
An 18-pad electrical campground was built, and 11 existing pads were extended for additional electrified sites.
- **Two Rivers State Recreation Area**
A double-vault CXT toilet was installed and sidewalks for ADA access were poured.

Hunting and Fishing

A close-up, profile view of a man wearing a brown camouflage baseball cap and a dark, patterned jacket. He is holding a rifle, with his hands visible on the barrel and trigger guard. He is looking off to the right with a serious expression. The background is a blurred natural setting, possibly a field or wetland, under a soft, warm light.

Epizootic Hemorrhagic Disease (EHD) Outbreak

The summer of 2012 saw Nebraska's worst outbreak of EHD since at least 1976. Reports of deer mortality began in mid-July and as of mid-October, nearly 6,000 dead deer had been reported by the public. Northern and eastern Nebraska appeared to be the hardest hit. In October, Game and Parks reduced the number of 2012 antlerless-only deer permits by approximately 9,000 in the affected regions. Lower permit sales and hunter success led to a 25- to 30-percent reduction in the statewide deer harvest during the November firearm season. Public information meetings in December gauged hunter and landowner perceptions of the status of deer numbers. That information helped formulate 2013 hunting regulations.

Angler Access Improvements

Access improvement features typically include fishing pads, piers, docks, shoreline clearing, walking trails, accommodations for the mobility challenged, and improved surfacing to shorelines. Projects were completed at Louisville State Recreation Area (SRA) Lakes 1a and 2. Additional projects have begun at Birdwood Lake, Bowling Lake, Brady and West Brady lakes, Burchard Reservoir, East and West Maxwell lakes, Fremont SRA lakes 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 16, 17, 18, 19 and 20; Fremont Slough Lake, Hershey Lake,

Louisville Lake 1, Sandy Channel SRA lakes 1a, 2, 4, and 8, and West Gothenburg Lake. New leases for public access were acquired for Clear Lake and another renewed for Swan Lake.

Boater Access Improvements

Existing facilities at Willow Creek State Recreation Area (SRA) and Long Pines Cozad Wildlife Management Area (WMA) were improved and a substantial renovation of the boat launch facility at Burchard WMA was completed as part of an Aquatic Habitat Project.

Dave McDermott and wife Angela on a teal hunt at Ducks Unlimited's Verona Complex in Clay County.

PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS

Economics of Hunting, Fishing, Park Use and Wildlife Viewing

A presentation outlining the economic impact of outdoor recreation in Nebraska was released by Game and Parks on the agency YouTube Channel. A total of \$1.7 billion in economic impact per year can be attributed to hunting, fishing, wildlife viewing, and state park use in Nebraska. These dollars have a real impact on local communities that benefit from nearby natural resource amenities.

Youth Lifetime Half-Price Permits

Sponsored by the Nebraska Game and Parks Foundation, this program awarded half-price lifetime permits to 323 Nebraska youth aged 15 or younger. These permits included 143 hunt/fish permits, 129 hunt permits, 30 habitat stamps, 18 fishing permits and three Nebraska migratory waterfowl stamps. The Nebraska Game and Parks Foundation investment was \$59,952.

Fish, Hunt and Watchable Wildlife Mobile Application

The Nebraska Fishing, Hunting and Watchable Wildlife Mobile Application was introduced to help locate fishing, hunting and outdoor recreation sites. It includes GPS mapping technology, regulations, species guides and other features.

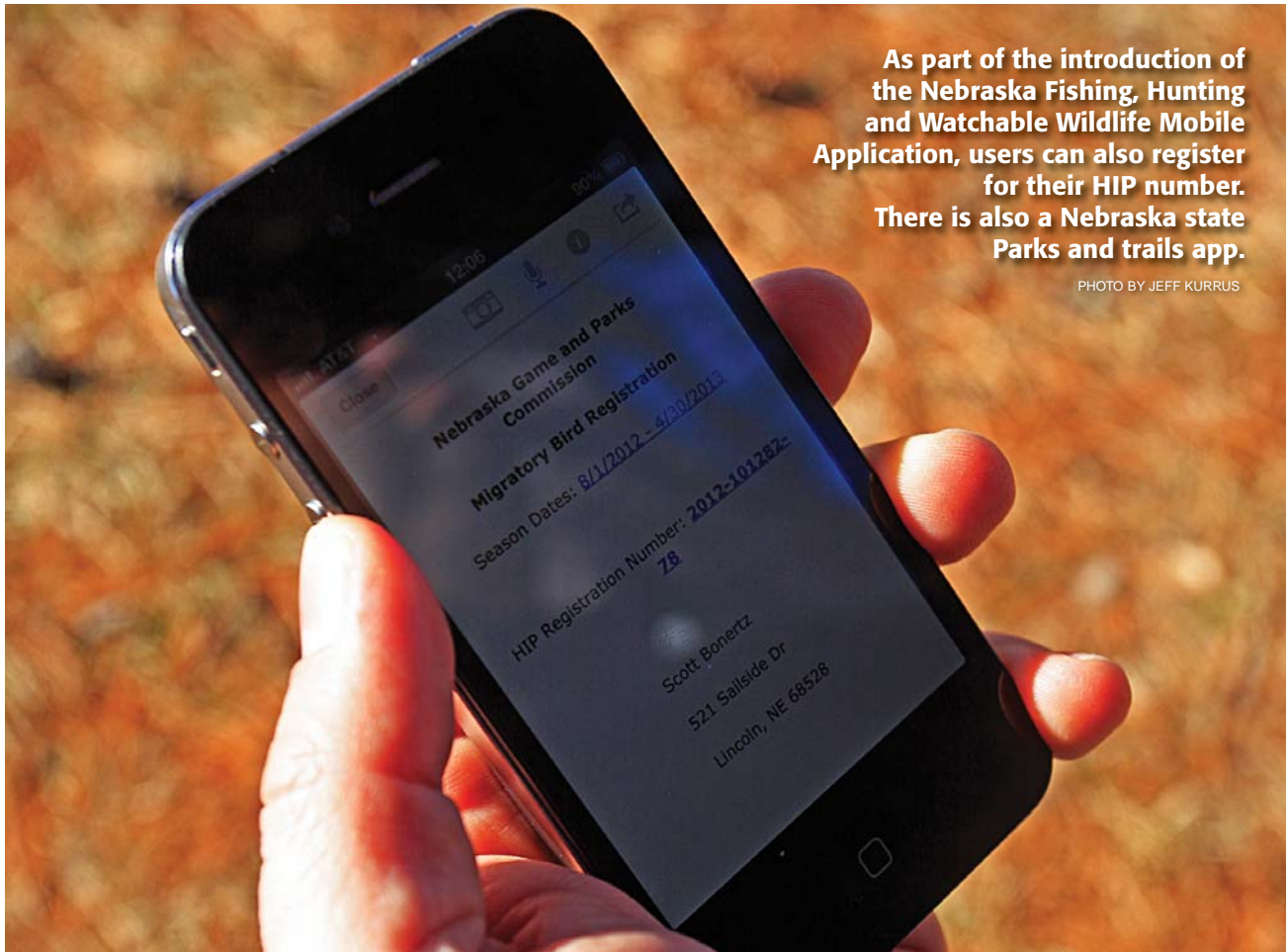
Platte River Recovery Implementation Program

In 2011, the program opened eight properties to limited public access. There now are 4,000 acres open that allow bird watching, mushroom hunting, hiking, fishing and deer and turkey hunting. Upland game hunting and waterfowl hunting were added to two properties in 2012. There was one property added in 2012; user participation doubled.

This fishing pier at Louisville SRA is part of the Angler Access Program.

PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS





As part of the introduction of the Nebraska Fishing, Hunting and Watchable Wildlife Mobile Application, users can also register for their HIP number. There is also a Nebraska state Parks and trails app.

PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS

Curtailling Illegal Night Hunting

An increase in fur prices in 2012 stimulated an increase in the number of trappers contacted by conservation officers in the field. The use of an airplane is an effective tool in curtailing the illegal night hunting of furbearers and deer. Illegal spotlighting from a vehicle is a frequent complaint. The Law Enforcement Division conducted eight nighttime aircraft details resulting in 25 citations and 12 additional warnings.

Open Fields and Waters Program

This program, which opens private land to walk-in hunting and fishing, has 272,000 acres of access through more than 700 contracts. Included in this are 214,290

acres of land, 408 acres of water and 40 miles of river.

Central Platte River Pilot Access Program

This new initiative was started to try to gain access to the Central Platte River corridor. More than 1,300 letters were sent to landowners who owned land within 2 miles of the Platte between Lexington and Central City. Three landowners submitted bids, one of which was awarded a public access contract. The Whooping Crane Trust submitted 1,039.5 acres, allowing waterfowl, upland and turkey hunting (with restrictions) on its property.

Private Waters Program

The agency's private waters specialist responded to 652 requests for assistance from owners of private waters. The top three requests for technical assistance involved: 1) requests for information on existing ponds, 2) vegetative issues, and 3) new pond construction. The technical and management assistance included

10 renovations and eight selective fish removals. Twenty ponds were approved for stocking by Game and Parks.

Youth Mentor Hunting Programs

Thanks to partnerships with several conservation organizations and agencies, Game and Parks offered diverse hunting



Officer Cory Krause at the West Point Sportsman's Club Youth Pheasant Hunt.

NGPC PHOTO

opportunities to children who may not have the chance otherwise. There were one-day educational events and season-long mentoring programs that include a variety of game hunting with firearms and archery

equipment. Conservation officers sought out a number of partners in support of the program.



Conservation

Keeping Nebraska's Fish Healthy

Fisheries monitors wild fish populations, private aquaculture facilities and state fish hatcheries for prohibited pathogens, including viral hemorrhagic septicemia virus (VHSV) and whirling disease. Fish tissue samples collected from wild populations in 2011 and 2012 tested negative for VHSV. Routine fish health inspections were conducted on 11 private facilities and all of the state facilities, and all fish inspected in 2012 were found to be negative for all prohibited pathogens. Monitoring for aquatic invasive species



PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS

Logan Burke walks through a CRP field during a Focus on Pheasants hunt in Red Willow County.

also was conducted during fish health inspections at state and private hatcheries, with none found.

Aquatic Habitat Rehabilitations

Rehabilitation projects were underway at Arnold Lake, Burchard Reservoir, Carter Lake, Harlan County Reservoir, Lake Helen, Victoria Springs Lake, Valentine National Wildlife Refuge, Fremont State Recreation Area (SRA) lake 13 and Willow Lake. Projects were completed at Fremont SRA lakes 1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16 and 17; Gracie Creek Pond; and Jenny Newman Pond. Maintenance work was completed at Grove Lake, Memphis Lake, and was in progress at Rock Creek Lake, Summit Lake and Sherman Reservoir.

Lake Renovations

The fish communities in North Platte Interstate 80 Lake, Crystal Lake, Pierce City Lake, Clear Lake (Brown County), Sandy Channel 1A and 6 and Fremont State Recreation Area lakes 7, 8, 9, and 16 were renovated to eliminate undesirable species and make way for stocking sport fish.

Habitat Enhancement and Vegetation Control

Fisheries and wildlife staff placed brush piles in Sherman Reservoir, Red Willow Reservoir, Summit Lake and Willow Creek Reservoir. These trees will attract fish, especially crappie, for anglers.

Assessing Nebraska's Fish Populations

Fisheries staff sampled fish populations in 126 lakes and reservoirs and two cold-



PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER

Commission biologists Tony Barada and Jeff Jackson pull fish from their sampling nets at Lake Wanahoo State Recreation Area.

water (trout) streams. The information collected is used to evaluate management strategies, such as regulations and stocking, and is shared with anglers via the webpage and printed copy to help them plan fishing trips.

Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) Sign-up

A general CRP sign-up was held in the spring and almost 97,000 acres were enrolled into the program. Another 5,000 acres were enrolled using continuous CRP practices. Overall, there are 900,372 acres enrolled in CRP. Game and Parks and partner staff spent many hours providing

informational workshops and encouraging landowners to sign up for the most wildlife-friendly practices.

Emergency Haying and Grazing

Extreme drought and high temperatures have depleted forage resources in Nebraska, resulting in the governor calling for the allowance of emergency haying and grazing and requesting public entities to assist in providing forage to livestock producers in need. Approximately 1,000 acres of hay ground and 1,300 acres of grazing land on wildlife management areas across the state were offered to the public for harvest. These acres were previously



scheduled for haying and grazing, so there was not a detrimental impact on long-term wildlife or plant resources.

Bighorn Sheep Translocation

Forty Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep were relocated from Canada to private canyon land northeast of Harrison in Sioux County in February. A multi-division contingent of 17 Game and Parks employees and two U.S. Department of Agriculture veterinarians traveled to Alberta to join 50 local public agency personnel and private individuals to trap the sheep. It was the fifth introduction of sheep in Nebraska, which will help to populate unoccupied habitat and increase the genetic diversity of our herd.

Habitat Share Program

This partnership with Pheasants/Quail Forever, National Wild Turkey Federation and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) facilitates the establishment and enhancement of early successional habitat on wildlife management areas (WMAs) to benefit upland game birds. Game and Parks and the USFWS provide 75 percent of the cost of selected habitat projects in the form of Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration funds, and the nonprofit partners provide the 25 percent matching funds, as well as administrative oversight of contractors.

This arrangement increases Game and Parks' capacity to improve habitat on the WMAs and allows managers to reach habitat objectives more quickly. In 2012, this increased capacity led to additional habitat projects on 36 WMAs totaling 2,862 acres.

Bighorn sheep watch as Commission staff and Canadian officials set nets at a trapping site in Alberta, Canada, in February 2012. Forty sheep were brought back to Nebraska and released in the Pine Ridge near Harrison.

PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER



Focus on Pheasants

South Central Focus on Pheasants

This new Focus on Pheasants area was formed in January 2012 and encompasses 353,000 acres in Harlan and Furnas counties. More than 7,800 acres have been enrolled in pheasant-friendly activities. Game and Parks also is working with the Rainwater Basin Joint Venture on a GIS project that looks at habitat factors that drive spring pheasant and quail distribution.

Small Grain Stubble Program

This Southwest Focus on Pheasants incentive has more than 21,000 acres enrolled since 2010. The landowner agrees to cut wheat or milo stubble above 14 inches and leave it undisturbed until at least April 1. The stubble provides excellent hunting cover and the addition of the small

grains on a landscape with good grass cover has proved to be a great combination for pheasant production.

Fish Stocking

Game and Parks' fish hatcheries produced and stocked approximately 40.4 million fish (20 species) into 257 public Nebraska water bodies. This included 30 million walleye fry and 3.6 million walleye fingerlings; 250,599 rainbow trout; 6,876 brook trout; 5,925 cutthroat trout; 247,068 channel catfish; 143,675 black crappie fingerlings; 62,670 northern pike fingerlings; 6,270 northern pike; 19,192 hybrid striped bass (wiper) fingerlings; 17,415 spotted bass fingerlings; 6,000 hybrid triploid crappies and 7,831 catchable-size black bullheads.

Education

Shooting Range Development

A statewide plan for shooting range development highlighted major needs: 1) more shooting/outdoor skills education facilities in state parks and communities, 2) rifle sight-in ranges on wildlife management areas (WMA) where there are more than 2,500 big game permit buyers within 50 square miles, 3) reintroduce the shooting range grant assistance program for nonprofit facilities.

The design for the Lincoln Shooting Park and Education Center began and a final design for rifle sight-in ranges was completed at Osage and Wood Duck WMAs.

Roger G. Sykes Outdoor Heritage Education Complex

The second season at this Platte River State Park education complex saw participation triple from 2011. Part of the reason for the increase was the addition of the trap shooting range. A total of 4,122 participants, in various programs, used the facility in 2012.

GIS Trails Database Completed

The Parks, Engineering and Information Technology divisions completed the trails database that encompasses all trails in the state park system. That included 524 miles of river trails and 517 miles of hike/bike and equestrian trails. There were 32 park areas mapped.

High School Fishing

Game and Parks and the Nebraska Chapter of The Bass Federation held the

second annual Nebraska State High School Fishing Tournament at Summit Lake in July. Matt Neiburg and Zac Madsen of Blair won that tournament and then won the regional tournament in October in Arkansas. They advanced to the April 2013 national tournament in Arkansas.

Cabela's "Wanna Go Fishing for Millions?" Program

Nebraska was among 19 states where fish were implanted with tags that could be redeemed by anglers for prizes worth up to \$2 million. In Nebraska, 108 fish were tagged in 10 reservoirs. Eighty-seven tags were redeemed nationwide, including 10 from Nebraska reservoirs.

Aquatic Education

The hot and dry summer in 2012 proved to be a challenge for Family Fishing Nights. When evening temperatures are still above 100 degrees, it is challenging to attract families outdoors, even if the fishing equipment, bait, and instruction are provided. Approximately 1,100 participants attended 28 Family Fishing Night events. In addition to Carp-O-Rama and several other workshops, there were 203 fishing clinics taught by 214 volunteers to 15,760 children. Nineteen additional volunteers were trained to teach fishing clinics.

Ak-Sar-Ben Aquarium

A total of 12,952 children and 2,787 adults visited the Aquarium in 2012. Staff presented 74 live-animal demonstrations and sponsored 37 off-site events, attended by 5,169 children and 675 adults.



Volunteer Pam Cheever helps a young angler at a Family Fishing event at Halleck Park pond in Papillion.

PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER

Nebraska Biodiversity Posters

Working with experts across the state, a series of Nebraska Biodiversity posters was created by the Project WILD team. The series of seven posters include birds, mammals, insects, fish, amphibians and reptiles, plants, and threatened and endangered species. Each poster features 25 hand-drawn species that promote the vast biodiversity of our state.



Trail Tales Magazine

This quarterly magazine is distributed to nearly 28,000 Nebraska fourth graders each year. It focuses on natural history, outdoor skills and ecological topics. With each issue, teachers receive a guide to help them use the articles to incorporate conservation and nature education into their curriculum.

In 2012, Trail tales was awarded First Place in the *Education and Outreach* category of the Association for Conservation Information's 2011 competition.

NEBRASKAland Magazine

Published by the Commission since 1926, *NEBRASKAland Magazine* continues to educate and entertain its subscribers. In 2012, the magazine was awarded a Second Place in the *Magazine Destination*,



Historical or Cultural Article category, and Third Place in the *Magazine Wildlife Article* category of the Association for Conservation Information's 2011 competition.

Missouri River Outdoor Expo

The eighth expo, held at Ponca State Park, hosted approximately 52,000 visitors, an increase of more than 20 percent from 2011. The Invitational School Day hosted

School day at the Missouri River Outdoor Expo included a class of 5th graders from Ponca public school on animal track identification.

PHOTO BY PAT ENGELHARD



892 students from 21 schools in the tri-state area. The outdoor skill-based expo had more than 95 exhibits representing 78 organizations and businesses. In addition to agency staff, there were more than 1,000 volunteers.

Conservation Officers' Role in Education

Officers presented 1,380 programs to youth, sportsmen and civic organizations.

Their hours teaching hunter education increased 25 percent from 2011. They conducted 13 youth mentored hunts and oversaw the Cornhusker Trap Shoot.

Nebraska Youth Conservation Program

This program took place for six weeks in the summer to teach youth life skills and introduce them to the natural resources of the state. There were 16 crews, with 32

crew leaders and 112 crew members at the end of the program. The youth were provided transportation, clothing and meals during the work days. Work was done at 23 state recreation areas, one state historical park and 41 wildlife management areas.

Completed projects included the construction of fencing, picnic shelters, and viewing and hunting blinds, playground

installation, campground electrical projects, picnic table repair and painting, trash pickup, deck and railing system, and shoreline protection.

The program offered educational experiences for the youth once a week, in which they learned skills such as kayaking, fishing, firearms safety, archery, insect identification, nature hiking, bird watching, prairie exploration and fish seining.

Other Programs

- **Learning to Hunt Workshops** – These workshops give individuals, regardless of age or experience, a chance to gain knowledge and increase their enjoyment and success while hunting. For many, it is an opportunity to explore new recreational opportunities.

- **National Archery in the Schools Program** – Since November, 20 Nebraska schools have added this program to their curriculum, pushing the total number of schools participating to more than 200. The program's state tournament attracted more than 400 archers, representing 20 schools, and 1,200 spectators.

- **Outdoor Skills Camps** – In 2012, 160 children ages 12-15 years learned shooting and fishing skills through a cooperative effort with the Nebraska 4-H Camping Centers.

- **Outdoor Skills After School Programs** – Approximately 350 students in grades 3-6 participated in this eight-week program, which focuses on hunting, fishing, camping, hiking and wildlife identification and management. Lessons are accompanied with an educational kit containing equipment and materials for the activities.

- **Outdoor Discovery Programs** – Approximately 4,000 students attended



As part of the Nebraska Youth Conservation Program, Tyler Yates (left) and Nick Shelor, both of Lincoln, set a post while installing a new fence at Pawnee SRA last summer.

PHOTO BY DOUG CARROLL

PHOTO BY DOUG CARROLL



National Archery in the Schools Program (NASP) saw a substantial increase in participants in 2012.

these school events at Scottsbluff, Fort Kearny State Recreation Area and Platte River State Park, where they were introduced to many outdoor skills. The program, in its sixth year, provided a solid outdoor education component to the schools' normal curriculum. The program had more than 300 volunteers and staff representing all agency divisions. Fort Kearny also hosted a public day, with approximately 3,000 people attending.

- Hunter Education – The Hunter Education Program held 511 classes and field days certifying 8,246 students (6,556 firearm and 1,690 bow hunter). The classes were taught by 1,339 instructors. In

addition, 71 apprentices were certified as instructors.

- Boating Safety Education – Nebraska's Boating Safety Education program certified 2,505 students in 151 classes in 2012. There were 44 boating accidents in the state. Seven deaths were reported. There were 86,248 boats registered in the state.

- State Park Volunteer Program – This program had 3,895 volunteers in 10 programs. Activities that volunteers participate in include landscaping, building of facilities, naturalist programs, fishing clinics, maintenance at the park and being a liaison between the public and the park through the Campground Host Program.

Partnerships





Wildfire Response

The summer of 2012 brought exceptional drought and high temperatures and, as a result, Nebraska experienced one of its worst wildfire years on record. About 141,000 and 76,000 acres burned in northwest and north-central Nebraska, respectively. Ponderosa pine forests in the Pine Ridge were among the hardest hit, with about 50,000 forest acres burned.

A total of 149 Game and Parks employees, representing several divisions from across the state, spent more than 8,500 hours fighting the fires. Several other agencies were involved in fighting the fires.

Five agency-owned areas were impacted, with approximately 8,000 acres burned. Metcalf and Bighorn wildlife management areas (WMA) were 100 percent burned, Chadron State Park was 99 percent burned, Ponderosa WMA was 50 percent burned and Chadron Creek WMA was 30 percent burned. Staff efforts prevented the loss of any structures at Chadron SP. Cleanup efforts have begun and a plan is being developed to address hazardous tree removal and replanting efforts.

Thousands of acres of deer and elk habitat were lost to the wildfires. The loss of habitat in the Ash Creek and Bordeaux units of the Pine Ridge

**Niobrara River valley, 18 miles northeast of
Bassett (Wentworth and Hall fires).**

NGPC PHOTO

Aerial of Iron Horse Trail Lake restoration project near DuBois.

PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER





PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER

Scenes from opening day at Lake Wanahoo SRA, a new Lower Platte North Natural Resources District reservoir managed by the Commission. Jon Yates, a University of Nebraska-Lincoln student and creel clerk, interviews Jesse Kulp of Omaha.

caused the elk herds to relocate into less desirable areas and eliminated some prime public hunting along East and West Ash Creek, as well as the area around Metcalf WMA.

Reduction of fuel loads in the remaining areas of unburned forest will remain a management challenge for years to come.

Assessing Angling Success

Angler creel surveys were conducted by the University of Nebraska Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit on 35 lakes and reservoirs. At 13 of these water bodies, only angler pressure count data were recorded. The full creel surveys, conducted at 22 lakes and reservoirs, measured fishing pressure, catch rates, harvest, and angler choices on fishing locations. This information is used to evaluate management practices, including

the effectiveness of fishing regulations, as well as knowledge of Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) issues and aquatic habitat rehabilitation projects.

New Reservoir Construction

Nebraska's Natural Resource Districts (NRD) often are the primary partners in the construction and development of new reservoirs. Technical and funding assistance was provided for the construction of West Papillion Site 5 near Papillion and the Pigeon-Jones Creek Site 15 near Hubbard. Coordination and planning with NRD partners for the proposed new Duck Creek 12 Reservoir near the Peru and Papio Dam Site 15A Reservoir and recreation area planned northwest of Omaha are in progress.



PHOTO BY SCOTT STUHR

1,800 participated in the Nebraska Outdoor U program that launched in 2012.

Invasive Species Program

Fisheries staff coordinated, provided funding support, and conducted field sampling as part of a joint Aquatic Invasive Species Program with the University of Nebraska Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit. From May through August, staff conducted boater surveys designed to gauge public awareness of invasive species and assess changes in boater prevention behavior.

Staff surveyed 1,350 boaters – plus an

additional 1,290 trailer survey. With three years of survey data in hand, analyses indicate a 25-percent increase in Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) awareness from 2010-2012 (up to 94 percent in 2012). The primary goal is to change boater behavior so that precautionary measures are taken to prevent the spread of AIS. Data shows a 45-percent increase in boaters who regularly inspect their boats for AIS.

During surveys, technicians also educated the public regarding the problems associated with aquatic invasive species and how to prevent their spread. More than 18,000 people were educated or trained on Nebraska's Clean, Drain, and Dry Protocol in 2012. Veliger (larval zebra/quagga mussels) sampling was conducted across the state on all major water bodies from May-August. More than 200 samples were collected from more than 40 reservoirs. All samples were analyzed and found to be negative for zebra/quagga mussel veligers.



PHOTO BY KARIE DECKER

Zebra mussels found at Zorinsky Lake in Omaha in December 2010.

Nebraska Outdoor U!

This program was launched in January 2012 through a partnership with the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension. This online program recognizes interested individuals for completing skill challenges in hunting, fishing, shooting or camping and gaining outdoor knowledge at their own pace, by combining online resources and in-the-field experiences. There were more than 1,800 participants by the end of the year.

Pollinator Educator Workshops

The Nebraska Project WILD program held three workshops on pollination and pollinators, which are critical in prairie and agricultural ecology. These workshops provided more than 40 educators with the knowledge and resources to incorporate pollinators and pollination into their curriculum.

Hunters Helping the Hungry

This program was established by the Nebraska Legislature to provide venison to Nebraskans in need of food



PHOTO BY LINDSAY ROGENS

Pollinator workshops were held in 2012 by the Project WILD program.

assistance. Game and Parks received more than \$86,000 in donations in the first nine months of the program, which allowed processing of more than 10,000 pounds of venison donated by deer hunters. The packaged meat was distributed to 11 charitable organizations serving Nebraskans in need.

Research

Missouri River Program

After flood conditions redirected sampling efforts in 2011, Game and Parks' Missouri River Program resumed standardized assessments that are funded by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Gill nets and otter trawls set at 25 randomly selected bends produced above-average numbers of year-old shovelnose sturgeon, blue suckers and sauger than before the flood. However, catch rates of small-bodied fish in mini-fyke nets appeared below average.

Larval paddlefish and larval and young-of-the-year sturgeon were collected from the river's main channel and associated constructed side channels and backwaters in 2012. Spawning behavior of an adult female pallid sturgeon was documented below the Platte River via a transmitter. Several larval sturgeon were subsequently captured in the area. Genetic confirmation is pending on these samples to verify whether they are the endangered pallid or shovelnose sturgeon.

Pallid Sturgeon Broodstock Collection

Game and Parks' Missouri River Program organized the fifth annual intensive effort targeting collection of pallid sturgeon in reproductive condition from the upper channelized Missouri River. Volunteers representing multiple universities, state and federal agencies, and the public provided 188 days of assistance in March and April. The above-average water temperatures associated with the warm spring hampered this year's collection efforts. Eighty-four pallid sturgeon were collected, seven of

which were taken to the Gavins Point National Fish Hatchery to serve as potential brood fish for artificial propagation.



Several plains topminnows (*Fundulus sciadicus*) swim through pond grass.

Plains Topminnow Reintroduction

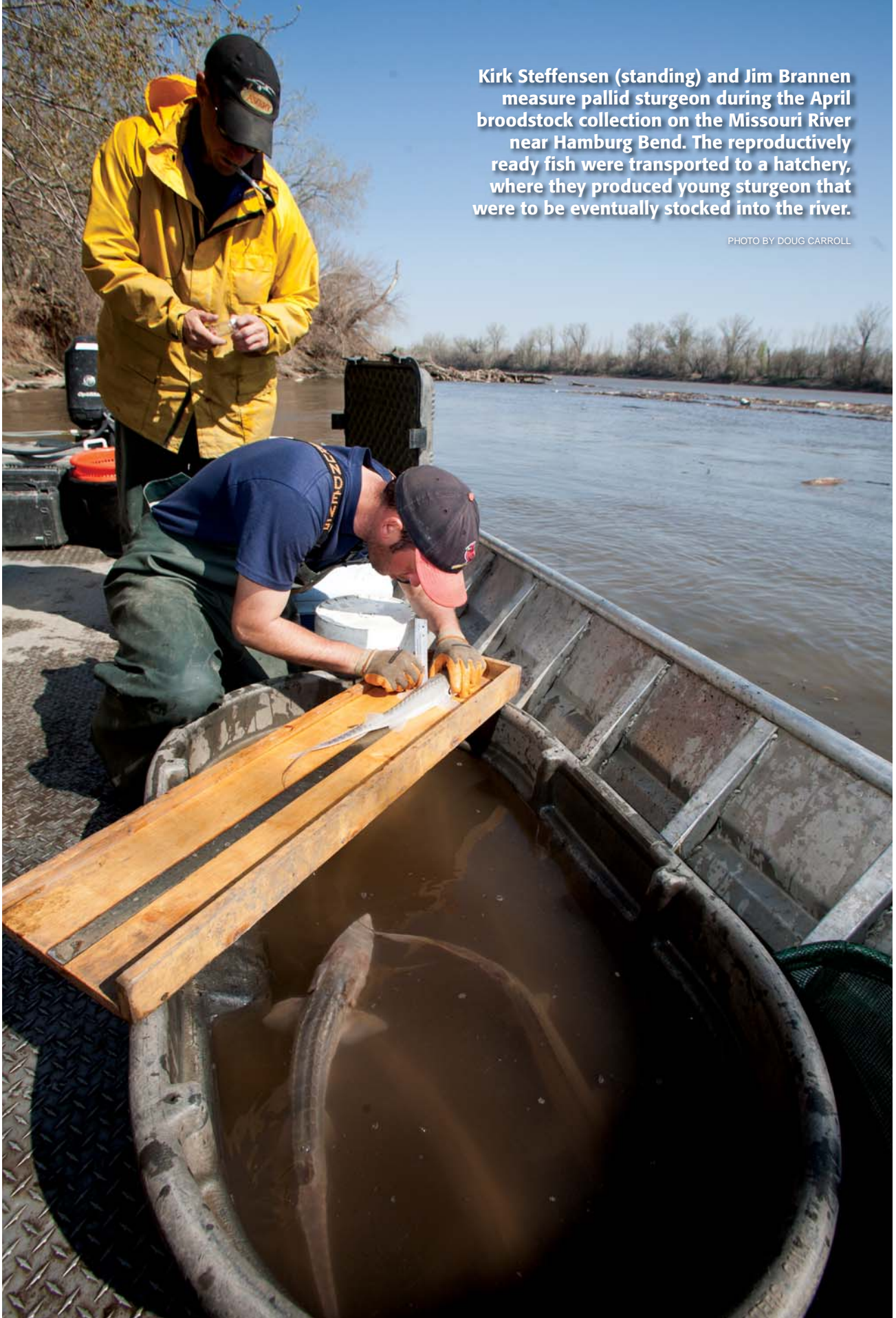
The plains topminnow is not found in nearly 75 percent of historic Nebraska locations. This decline prompted Game and Parks to evaluate stocking densities (1,000 and 2,500 fish per acre of habitat) and stocking times (April and October). Successful introductions were reported at seven of 17 (41 percent) of stocked sites, a greater success rate than typically found for similar species. The movement of released fish indicated that successful repatriation can provide sufficient stock to re-colonize many historic sites within a drainage.

Fingerling Walleye Stocking Success

Fisheries staff evaluated the success of fingerling walleye stocking in southeast Nebraska reservoirs, determining success was greatly reduced if the catch rates of largemouth bass exceeded 100 fish per hour of night electroshocking. Stocking

Kirk Steffensen (standing) and Jim Brannen measure pallid sturgeon during the April broodstock collection on the Missouri River near Hamburg Bend. The reproductively ready fish were transported to a hatchery, where they produced young sturgeon that were to be eventually stocked into the river.

PHOTO BY DOUG CARROLL





A biologist attaches a radio transmitter to a flathead catfish at Branched Oak Reservoir to track the fish and learn about its habitats and movements.

PHOTO BY JERRY KANE

walleys greater than 8 inches in length will be conducted and evaluated over the next several years.

Flathead Catfish Population Dynamics

Flathead catfish population dynamics (density, size and age structure, growth rates, body condition, annual mortality and recruitment) were evaluated at Branched Oak Reservoir. In addition, electrofishing sampling efficiency and movement and habitat use of adult catfish during the summer was assessed using radio tags.

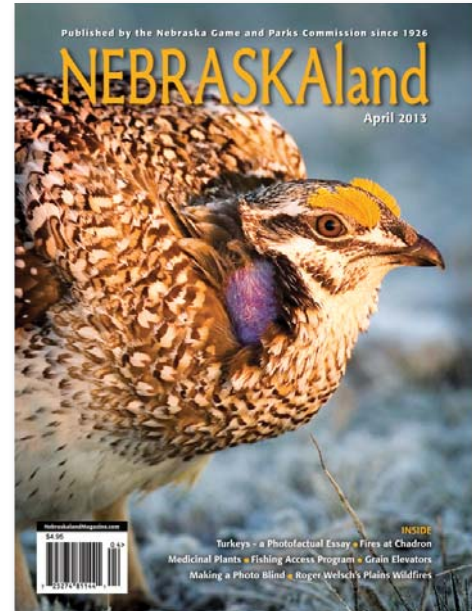
Angler Survey

For the first time in a decade, a comprehensive angler survey was conducted, using 10,000 mailed surveys and an electronic version that was sent to approximately 35,000 anglers with e-mail addresses. Through this survey, we will determine how angler activities, opinions and desires have changed over time and how answers differ for the two survey methods. Information collected will be used to adjust our approaches to managing fisheries.

Nebraska State Parks
Where memories are made.

Come visit us today!
NEBRASKA
—GAME PARKS—
Make reservations online at www.OutdoorNebraska.org
or call 402-471-1414 (9 a.m. - 6 p.m., M-F, CST)

13
Nebraska Annual Park Permit
www.OutdoorNebraska.org



Marketing and communications will target growth audiences with broad messages focusing on having fun and creating memories.

Image and Brand Equity

Information and Education staff worked with Strategic Marketing and Research, Inc. to examine Game and Parks' image and brand equity, competitors, what motivates consumers, consumer segments and how to reach them, perceptions of *NEBRASKAland Magazine*, and Nebraskans' levels of participation in outdoor recreation.

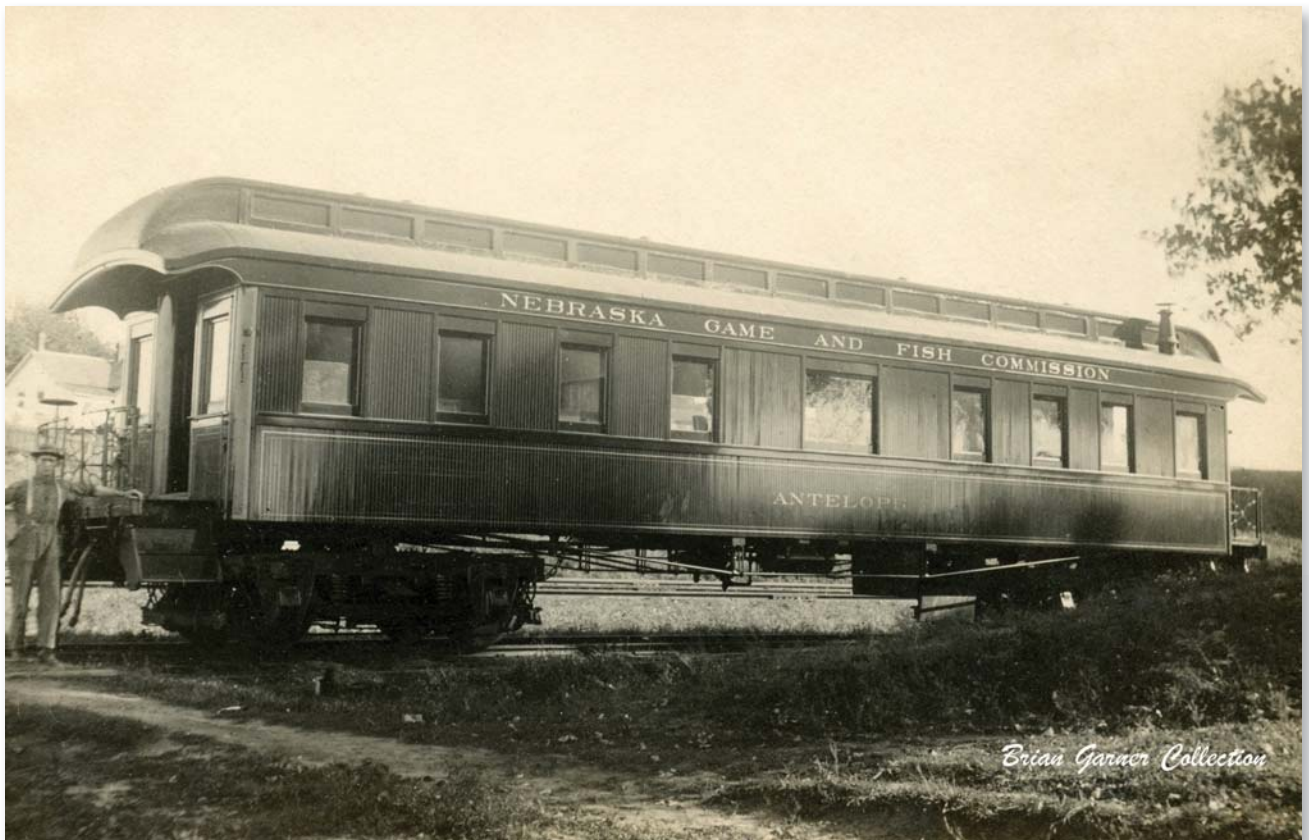
Some notable findings:

- Consumers are generally positive about the outdoor recreation Nebraska offers but are not very knowledgeable about available opportunities.
- Game and Parks has a positive image

and gets good reviews for performance from general consumers.

- Game and Parks should focus on the fun of being outdoors, conservation and creating and re-living memories.

The report contained detailed information to use in future communication and marketing efforts, including motivational keys, messaging and media usage. A communication strategy is being created to strategically educate consumers about Game and Parks, deliver agency key messages and grow usage of the outdoor recreational resources.



*Beginning in 1889, a rail car was purchased and used by the Nebraska Game and Fish Commission (forerunner of our present-day Nebraska Game and Parks Commission) for the purpose of transporting fish for stocking across the state. This first State Fish Car, labeled the **Antelope** (shown above), traveled over Nebraska, and was stocked with all kinds of fish. This kept the streams, lakes and ponds supplied with fish year-round. During 1901 and 1902 this car passed over a distance of 9,279 miles in its rounds of distribution.*

*In 1918, a second fish rail car – the **Angler** (later named the **Waltonian**), was obtained by the agency to replace the Antelope. This rail car was used to haul fish around the state for stocking in various waters until about 1931. After that time, specially-built trucks then took over for fish transport.*

The fish cars were not without accident or danger. In the summer of 1873, approximately 300,000 fish, including striped bass, tautog, American eel, channel catfish, largemouth bass, American shad, brook trout, yellow perch, walleye, minnows, lobsters and oysters were accidentally planted in Nebraska's Elkhorn River when a railroad bridge collapsed. Three people died in this mishap. The U.S. Fish Commission train was going from Massachusetts to California.



NEBRASKA
— GAME  PARKS —

See You Out There.