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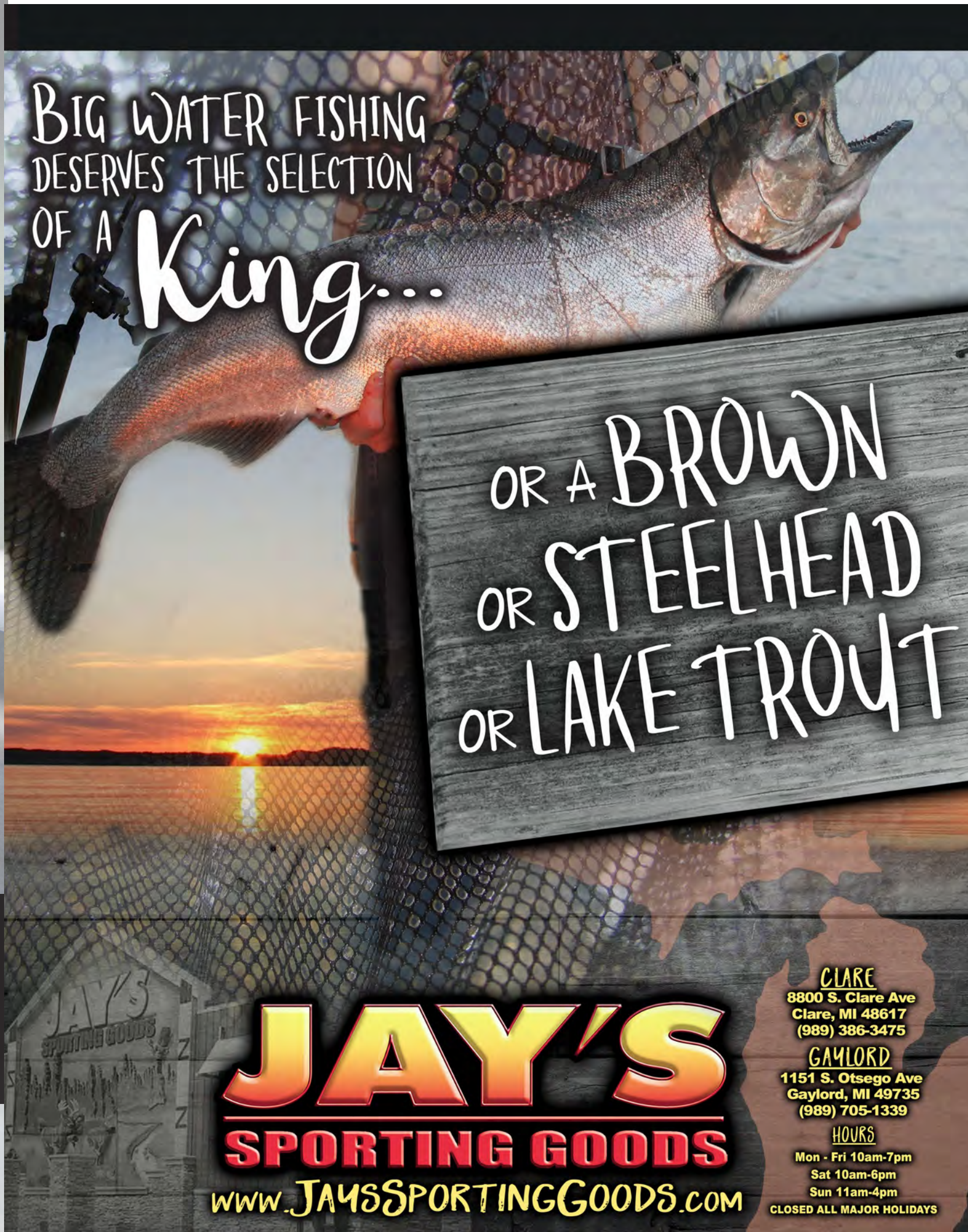
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Cover Photo: Shannon Smith holds a woodcock that her dog, Tag, helped her harvest. Tag left us a little too early, but he was one of the photographer's favorite dogs.
Photo credit: Dave Veldman (Sportdog Photography)

"Have you had your seasonal shots?"

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Nick Green, Editor

WELCOME TO MICHIGAN OUT-OF-DOORS

MICHIGAN'S PREMIUM OUTDOOR JOURNAL

Wolves have been consuming a whole lot of my time the last few months. From Wolf Management Advisory Council (WMAC) meetings to lawsuits and everything in between, the topic seems to continue to grab headlines.

In early August, the latest iteration of the WMAC met for the first time in Ispehming. A solid turnout of hunters, trappers and conservationists showed support for state management of wolves.

At that meeting, the former large-carnivore specialist for the department gave public comment detailing minimum wolf population counts and how the auditing process works within the department. He noted that his counts were lowered at least two different times and that he had heard this also happened to other staff. In short, he said this led to his departure from the department.

I think we can all agree that a well-greased system of checks and balances (auditing the counts) better serves us all. What I saw after that meeting made me cringe, though.

Hunters, trappers and conservationists immediately took the words spoken and started to spin them to suit their goal: hunting wolves. Many claimed corruption within the department, called for heads to roll and said that the department must also be doing this with other game or non-game species counts.

I don't discount the need for transparency. Coming from a background in hard-news journalism, I like the truth — no matter how ugly. And I certainly don't discount folks' wariness of the processes that set the minimum wolf population count when two opposing sides, BOTH of whom can be trusted, have a little different view of how the process played out.

Hunters, anglers and conservationists need to let the facts, science and data drive the conversation, not accusations. We have to check our emotions and approach the situation more critically than we are.

I am not accusing the former specialist of lying; in fact, I don't believe he is at all. But, I am not accusing our department of "under-counting" wolves either.

I can assure you that any wrongdoing will be investigated. I know how hard it can be to sit back and be told the government agency you have entrusted with your wild places and wildlife is doing the right thing when sometimes it doesn't feel that way. I know you all care deeply, and that is why the public testimony given at the first WMAC reverberated throughout the hunting community.

We need to keep our team whole. And we need to better understand the exact process of how minimum wolf population counts happen, how they are audited, who has final say and how many people have final say.

Until we have that information, which will be presented in the coming months at WMAC meetings, we need to remember there are two sides to every story and that jumping to conclusions only further divides our team and provides strength to the antis.

Again, I fully understand the frustration. I am just asking that we have a little patience and let the extraordinary team of wildlife managers we have here give us a little insight into the process.

If there is wrongdoing, Michigan United Conservation Clubs will not be bashful in our approach to engaging the DNR and holding them accountable. But, let's let this play out before we start giving the antis more fuel.

Yours in Conservation,

MOMENTS *of* MEMORY

The bedrock of conservation is taking care of our natural resources so that they can be passed down to future generations. The natural resources that we conserve today were conserved for us by generations of conservationists preceding us, and these generations are ever-changing and ever-flowing. Here we honor the passing of one generation of conservationists to the next.

In memory of

Bob Hawkins

from

Family of Charles Parmelee; Mr. Lee Zick; Mr. & Mrs. Ray Zick

In memory of

Jary J. Rothermel

from

Hubert & Donna Johnson & Family; Linda Voyles; Dale & Daniel Lessenberg

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from

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from

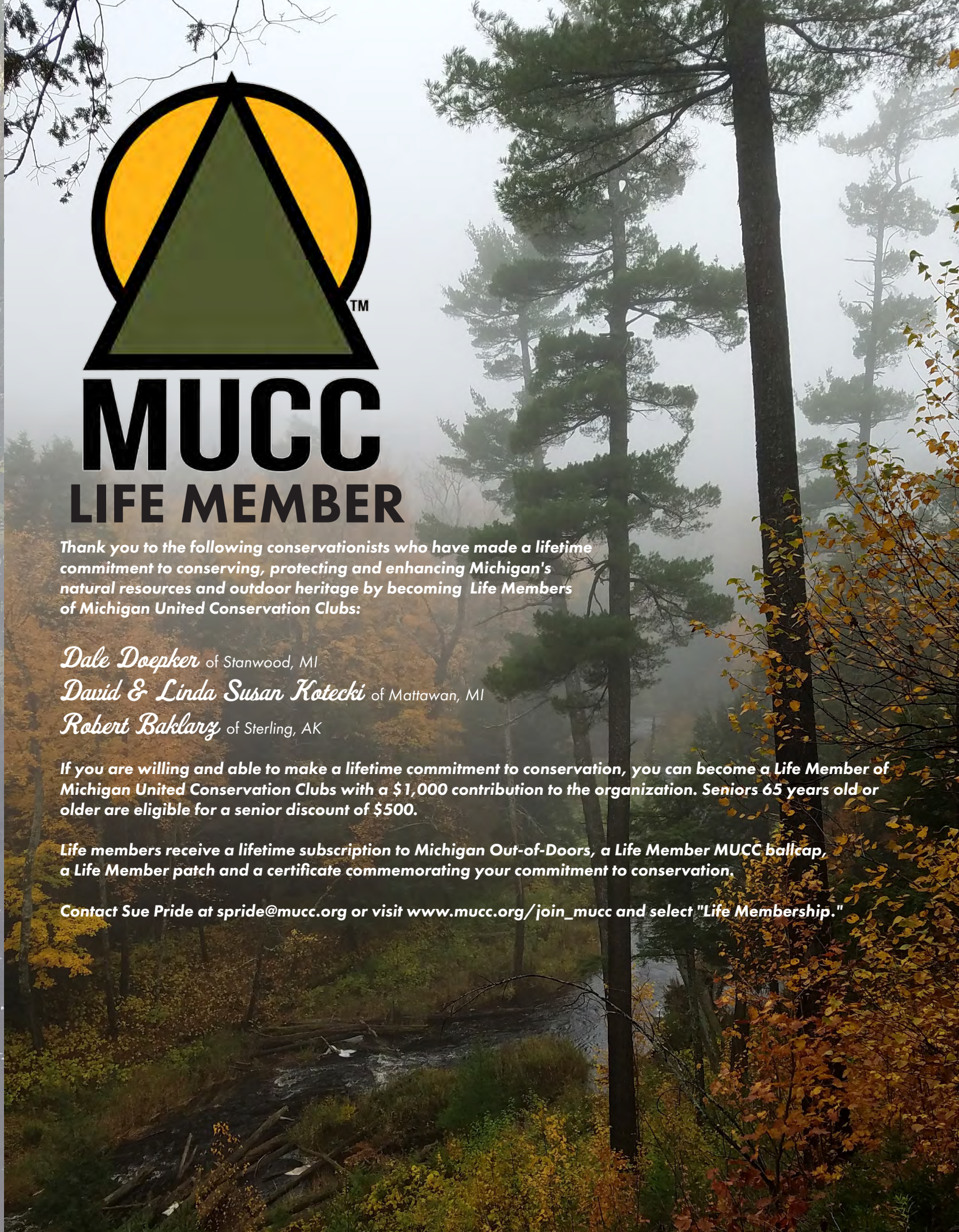
Harry & Michele Curtis

Jary J. Rothermel

from

Stephen Wiber & Evart Hunt Club

If you have recently lost someone you would like to honor here, please contact Sue Pride at spride@mucc.org.



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Thank you to the following conservationists who have made a lifetime commitment to conserving, protecting and enhancing Michigan's natural resources and outdoor heritage by becoming Life Members of Michigan United Conservation Clubs:

Dale Doepker of Stanwood, MI
David & Linda Susan Kotecki of Mattawan, MI
Robert Baklarz of Sterling, AK

If you are willing and able to make a lifetime commitment to conservation, you can become a Life Member of Michigan United Conservation Clubs with a $1,000 contribution to the organization. Seniors 65 years old or older are eligible for a senior discount of $500.

Life members receive a lifetime subscription to Michigan Out-of-Doors, a Life Member MUCC ballcap, a Life Member patch and a certificate commemorating your commitment to conservation.

Contact Sue Pride at spride@mucc.org or visit www.mucc.org/join_mucc and select "Life Membership."

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Michigan United Conservation Clubs (MUCC) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization founded in 1937 by sportsmen's clubs from around Michigan to protect conservation from politics. Representing more than 40,000 members and supporters and approximately 200 affiliated conservation clubs, MUCC is the largest statewide conservation organization in the nation. MUCC members determine the organization's conservation policies through a robust grassroots process, which MUCC staff works to implement by working with elected officials, state and federal agencies, its members and the public. MUCC has published Michigan Out-of-Doors since 1947 and operates the Michigan Out-of-Doors Youth Camp in Chelsea, MI. Learn more about the full range of programs MUCC uses to advance conservation in Michigan and become a member at www.mucc.org.

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Step in, Step up for Conservation

Director's Desk

Amy Trotter
MUCC Executive Director

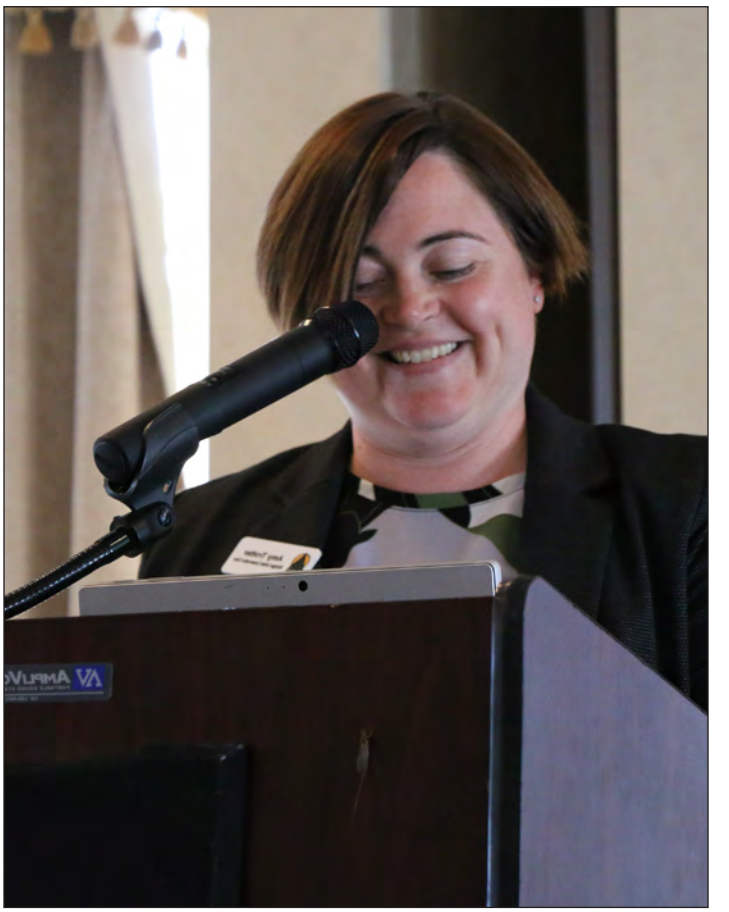
At the time of this writing, the Natural Resources Commission just hosted their first in-person meeting since February 2020 — 16 months have passed since handshakes and hallway conversations were a normal way to get things done and not the exception. But the one thing that hasn't changed throughout this time, no matter the method of communications or venue, was MUCC giving voice to our members in front of the decision makers in our state and nation.

September 24-26, MUCC members will also gather in person formally for the first time in more than two years at our 2021 Annual Convention at Treetops in Gaylord. But during this intervening time, the business of MUCC still was completed through an interim process of online voting on policy resolutions and the election of officers and countless Zoom meetings. As we celebrate our 84th year, it's proof you can teach an old dog new tricks.

But in order for our staff to represent you, we need to hear from you about what is motivating you to get outdoors, what is keeping you up at night and your ideas for improving our conservation and recreation opportunities in Michigan. MUCC's policy process is much more like the Michigan Legislature — a representative democracy. And depending on if you are a member of MUCC through one of our affiliated clubs or an individual member paying dues directly to MUCC, there is a different process by which your representative is chosen and carries your voice in the process. But, EVERY member of MUCC has the ability to offer a resolution on what they would like to put forward for consideration as a new policy position of the organization. They need to be supported with good, factual data and reasonable arguments.

This process happens year round, overseen by our Conservation Policy Board at their meetings three times per year, but it is only at our Annual Convention where these policy proposals are officially approved or voted down. In order for our staff to advocate to change a regulation or statute, the resolution must be approved with two-thirds support from our voting delegates.

I would like to challenge you to get involved! There are a plethora of opinions out there about the management of our natural resources in Michigan, but only the people and organizations who choose to become MUCC members, present the facts, engage in the debate and see it through will be able to harness the full power of MUCC's policy and communications staff, our full time lobbyists and a chance to engage the grassroots support of fellow hunters, anglers, trappers and conservationists. The next step in engagement is



MUCC Executive Director Amy Trotter laughs at a member's comment during the business portion of the 2019 MUCC Annual Convention.

to actually run for a position on MUCC's Executive Board (overseeing the whole organization) or Conservation Policy Board (managing the policy process) — we are always looking for "new blood" to volunteer their time and talents for conservation.

I want to ensure every MUCC member has a voice in the process, and I hope that you will use it as we attempt to make Michigan a better place in support of our mission "to conserve, protect, and enhance Michigan's natural resources and our outdoor heritage."Together, we make a great team and can make a big difference in this state if we can row in the same direction.

Yours in Conservation,

Amy Trotter

ON PATROL

In each issue of Michigan Out-of-Doors, we highlight some of the recent cases our brave Michigan Department of Natural Resources conservation officers handle. You don't want to find yourself on this list.

May 1 to May 15, 2021

Is this a country song?

COs Ethen Mapes and Zach Painter were patrolling a poaching complaint in Bergland when a vehicle entered the parking lot of the boat launch at a high rate of speed. The driver sped through the parking lot, coming to a screeching stop just before the gate to the fishing pier.

The driver honked the horn for approximately thirty seconds before spinning the tires all the way out of the parking lot and blowing through two stops signs. COs Mapes and Painter ran to their patrol truck and were able to make a traffic stop on the vehicle.

The driver was found to be intoxicated and irate that her husband was not fishing where he told her he would be. CO Mapes placed the driver under arrest for operating while intoxicated (OWI) as well as possessing open intoxicants in a motor vehicle.

Who needs a tape measure?

COs John Kamps and Josh Boudreaux were patrolling Marquette County lakes for anglers the evening before walleye opener. The COs observed occupants of a camp set out some glow bobbers not long before sunset.

After observing them all evening the COs contacted the group as they began reeling in their lines shortly before midnight. The pair stated they were just fishing for rock bass and a subsequent search of the area turned up no fish. A lengthy conversation was had with the group and the COs cleared the area.

The following morning as the COs patrolled the same lake, they contacted a boat which contained the same two anglers and found them to be in possession of an undersized walleye. The individual stated he measured the walleye with his boot. The walleye was released back into the water and a citation was issued for possessing a short walleye.

CO detective work

On Sundat evening, CO Andrea Erratt of Antrim County observed a vehicle pulled over with the passenger door open while patrolling in the Jordan River Valley. About an hour later, CO Erratt drove by where the vehicle had been sitting and observed two Busch Light cans.

CO Erratt retrieved the cans and noted the expiration and lot numbers on the bottoms. CO Erratt located the same vehicle a short while later stopped down the road. When contact was made, she observed two full Busch Light cans next to the passenger, who denied leaving his other cans on the side of the road earlier.

CO Erratt asked if she could look at the bottom of his beer cans, he consented, and she explained the lot and expiration numbers matched the cans she found by the road. CO Erratt asked him again where his empty cans were and he replied, "Probably in your truck."

CO Erratt ticketed him for littering and not providing a license on demand of a conservation officer.

Guns, booze and off-roading

CO Josiah Killingbeck, while on patrol, observed a vehicle that was illegally operating up a hill on a Consumers Energy right-of-way. CO Killingbeck drove around the hill climb to where he observed the vehicle re-enter the roadway without stopping for traffic.

CO Killingbeck contacted the

subjects, who advised they had just recently purchased the vehicle. There was no plate or insurance on the vehicle.

While speaking with the subject, CO Killingbeck observed a container of open intoxicants hidden underneath the passenger's legs. The passenger admitted to drinking the alcohol. After addressing the legalities of open intoxicants in a motor vehicle, CO Killingbeck asked if there were any firearms in the vehicle.

Both subjects were slow to admit that they were concealed pistol license (CPL) carriers and were both carrying firearms. CO Killingbeck determined that the passengers CPL had been revoked. Numerous violations were addressed, and citations were issued for the violations

Deeper than natural resources

While patrolling areas of the Stanton State Game Area (SGA), CO Mike Haas heard central dispatch call out information concerning missing individuals.

Two gentlemen had left an assisted living facility approximately four hours earlier and had failed to return, staff was worried since it had been a long time and it was getting dark outside.

CO Haas was close to the facility and diverted from his state land patrol to help with the search. CO Haas located one of the subjects on a back road not far from the facility and was able to guide him back to the home. The gentleman stated he was walking with his friend but had gotten tired and turned back to walk home and gotten lost.

CO Haas continued searching the area and located the second man about five miles away. The second man was tired and frustrated and told CO Haas he was trying to walk to the store to buy a soda pop.

CO Haas assisted the man by giving him a ride to the store so he could buy his pop and then returned him to the assisted living home.

Have to have permission

CO Jeremy Beavers assisted a private property owner with ongoing trespass issues. The property owner explained to CO Beavers that subjects have been riding ORVs on his property and he has been unable to keep them off, even when the property was posted.

In the latest incident, a subject rode his ORV on his property and cut and removed wood. CO Beavers walked the property and located an ideal spot to place a trail camera. CO Beavers checked the camera twice in a span of a week and a half and was somewhat surprised by how many people were captured on camera.

In total, seven ORVs and two people walking a dog were captured on camera during the day and night.

During a weekend patrol, CO Beavers sat on the property to monitor activity.

In one incident, two side-by-sides and a three-wheeler were caught turning on to the property from a closed portion of the road. CO Beavers informed the subjects that they were on private property that they did not have permission to be on. CO Beavers examined the ORVs and found additional violations on all three. The subjects were cited for not having the proper ORV stickers and warned for the additional violations.

During a later incident, CO Beavers stopped three, four-wheelers on a closed portion of the road next to the property. None of the subjects were wearing helmets and did not have an ORV sticker. One subject was transporting a passenger on a machine not designed for that use.

All subjects were cited for no helmets and were warned for the additional violations. CO Beavers explained to all subjects that they were also operating on a closed portion of the road which was a violation as well.

Really?

CO Joseph Deppen was checking anglers fishing along a boardwalk in St. Clair County. CO Deppen saw three lines casted out on the river in rod holders and a lone angler casting for walleye nearby.

CO Deppen asked if they were his rods. The angler responded, "Yup, all three of those are mine and this is my fourth," while smiling. CO Deppen asked if these are your three, then why are you casting for walleye with a fourth line? The man shrugged his shoulders and said, "I don't know, but thanks for giving me a warning on this one."

CO Deppen told the angler, this was not a warning type of situation, especially since he knows the law and is purposefully breaking it. A citation for fishing with more than three lines was issued.

Learning opportunities

CO Keven Luther assisted the Outdoor Adventure Center's (OAC) staff with a youth fishing derby at Milliken State Harbor.

The event's attendance was low due to the poor weather conditions. Nevertheless, the OAC and Wayne County Metro-Parks staff were willing and able to assist urban youths learn about Michigan's great outdoors.

These reports are randomly pulled from the DNR Law Enforcement Division's bi-weekly reports.

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MUCC's award-winning On the Ground (OTG) program has been hosting volunteer wildlife habitat improvement events across Michigan since 2013. Volunteers participate in a variety of wildlife habitat projects on public land and are provided an opportunity to engage in hands-on conservation while learning about wildlife habitat needs.

More than 3,200 volunteers have improved fish and wildlife habitat through weekend projects that involve building brush piles for small game, removing invasive trees, restoring grassland habitat through native flower and grass plantings, installing wood duck nest boxes, performing river clean-ups and planting a variety of trees for wildlife food and cover.

Registration is currently open for late summer and fall OTG habitat improvement events across Michigan. We will be restoring prairie habitat with the Pierce Cedar Creek Institute in Hastings (9/11), planting native trees and shrubs on public land in Menominee County (9/18), planting native trees and shrubs on public land in Frederic with the National Wild Turkey Federation (10/02), planting native wildflowers at Petersburg State Game Area with The Nature Conservancy (10/09) and planting trees on public land in Kalkaska (10/16). Please visit the OTG website or MUCC's social media for updates about the program and details regarding upcoming wildlife habitat events.

For more event details and to register for upcoming events, please visit www.mucc.org/on-the-ground or contact Habitat Volunteer Coordinator Makhayla LaButte at mlabutte@mucc.org.

Recovering America's Wildlife Act Reintroduced in Senate

By Drew YoungeDyke
National Wildlife Federation

Recovering America's Wildlife Act is closer to reality than ever before after a bipartisan, companion Senate version was reintroduced in July by Sens. Kirk Heinrich (D-NM) and Roy Blunt (R-MO). This is the most important wildlife conservation legislation since the 1937 Pittman-Robertson Act, directing funds to state and tribal wildlife agencies to recover species of greatest conservation need before they need Endangered Species Act protections. In Michigan, it would mean an additional $27 million annually in wildlife conservation funding.

The Senate bill, S.2372, complements the House of Representatives version reintroduced by Rep. Debbie Dingell (D-MI) and Jeff Fortenberry (R-NE) in April. More than one-third of wildlife species are listed as "species of greatest conservation need," at increased risk for extinction, extirpation or being designated as endangered in state wildlife action plans. The idea to inject sorely-needed funding – more than $1.4 billion – into those plans through the Wildlife Conservation Restoration Program emerged from a 2015 Blue Ribbon Committee which included Johnny Morris of Bass Pro Shops, Jeff Crane of the Congressional Sportsmen's Alliance and Collin O'Mara of the National Wildlife Federation.

"America's wildlife are in crisis. One-third of all species in the country currently face a heightened risk of extinction. This bill represents a bold, bipartisan vision for how we can recover wildlife and create jobs in every state across the nation," said Collin O'Mara, president and CEO of the National Wildlife Federation. "There is important work just waiting to be done restoring habitat, removing invasive species, stopping wildlife diseases, reducing water pollution and mitigating the harm from climate change. This bill will put people to work today protecting our wildlife heritage for tomorrow."

In Michigan, that work includes the specific actions detailed in

Kirtland's warbler (left) and the loon (above) are two species that would benefit greatly if the newest iteration of the Recovering America's Wildlife Act passes. Call your U.S. Senator today to voice your support for this legislation.

Michigan's 2015-2025 Wildlife Action Plan. Along with listing the state's species of greatest conservation need, it lists strategies for recovering those species and keeping them off the endangered species list. Michigan would receive an estimated $27 million annually through the Recovering America's Wildlife Act for wildlife conservation activities for species like lake sturgeon, cisco, common loon, Kirtland's warbler, osprey, sharp-tailed grouse, monarch butterfly, stoneflies, mayflies and moose.

Michigan's Wildlife Action Plan is a habitat-based set of recommended strategies. Habitat/focus areas include rivers and streams, inland lakes, Great Lakes, wetlands, grasslands, forests and emerging diseases. Actions broadly include managing habitat and invasive species, conducting research to improve wildlife management, public education about wildlife and protecting natural places for people and wildlife.

These plans have been chronically underfunded nationally. A consistent proposition from the hunting community has been that all citizens — not just hunters — need to shoulder more of the share of wildlife conservation funding; the Recovering America's Wildlife Act is the mechanism to do that. An injection of $27 million into those state plans would be the biggest wildlife conservation boost since the Pittman-Robertson Act. For reference, Michigan received just over $29 million from Sportfish Restoration Grants (Dingell-Johnson Fund) and Wildlife Restoration Grants (Pittman-Robertson Fund) in FY2020 combined.

With versions of the Recovering America's Wildlife Act now introduced in both the Senate and the House of Representatives, it has a real chance of being included in larger legislative packages. Whether it passes in this Congress depends on the level of bipartisan support it receives, exhibited by co-sponsors from both parties. As an individual hunter and angler, you can help it pass by encouraging your member of Congress to co-sponsor the Recovering America's Wildlife Act.

Amidst all the partisanship of recent years, conservation has been the rare bright spot of bipartisan unity in Congress. In 2019, a divided Congress passed the John D. Dingell Conservation, Management and Recreation Act to reauthorize the Land and Water Conservation Fund permanently. In 2020, a divided Congress passed the Great American Outdoors Act to permanently fund the Land and Water Conservation Fund. The Recovering American's Wildlife Act can continue this trend and secure our generation's contribution to the wildlife's future, just as previous generations added their contribution through the Pittman-Robertson Act.

That would be a legacy worth leaving.

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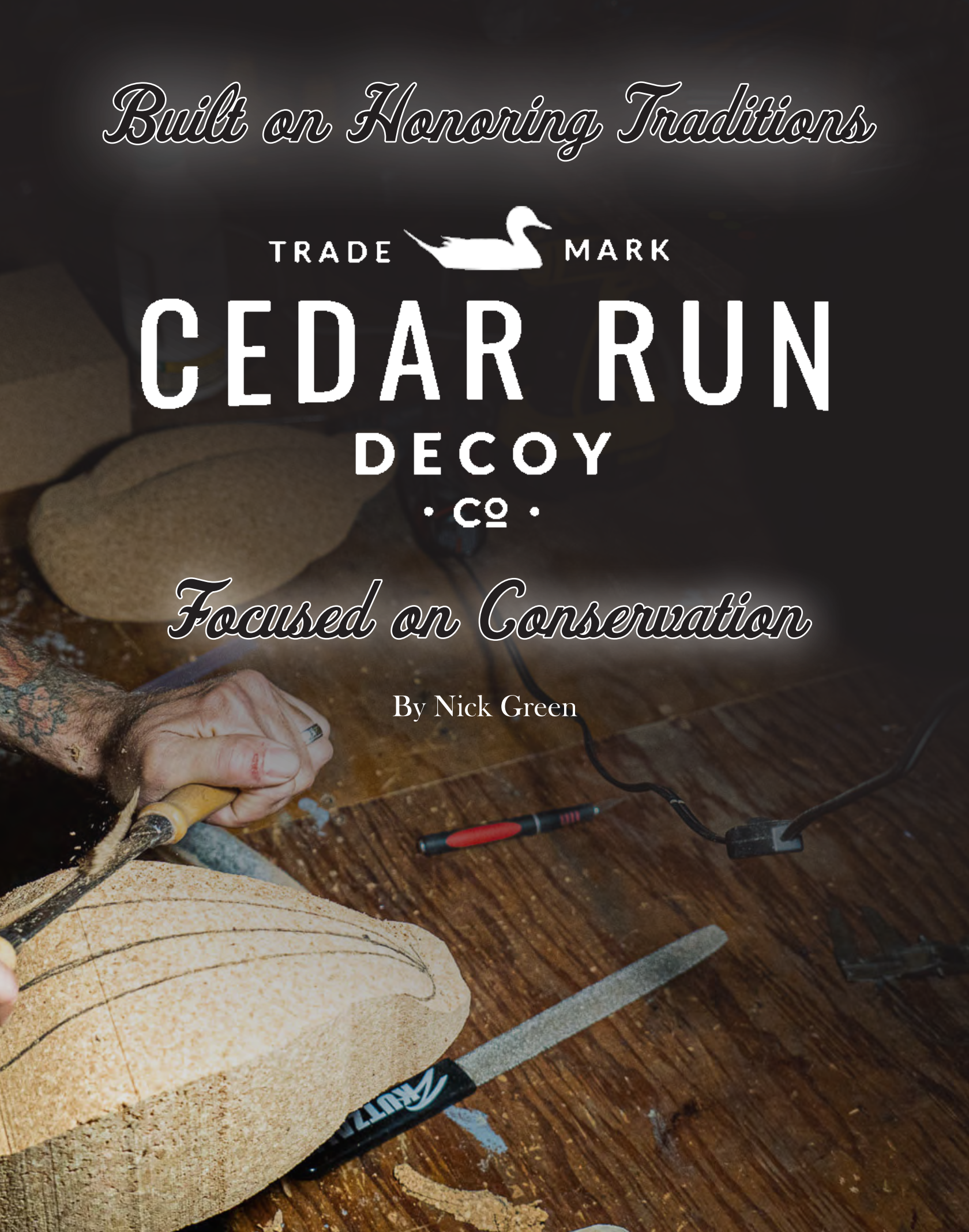
By Nick Green



PASSION AND CONSERVATION INTERSECT

Engagement with conservation can take many forms — whether you are buying a hunting license, banding ducks and geese, planting mast-producing trees, building small game habitat or donating money for habitat projects, there are a million ways to solidify your place as a conservationist in Michigan.

Your engagement with the wild places and wild things around you can be as hands-off or hands-on as you make it. And for most of us, conservation, including hunting and fishing, is probably more of a hobby rather than a lifestyle.

Not for Corey Lucas, though. Working on farms in Southern Michigan since he was eight, Corey learned the value of sweat equity, hard work and problem solving at an early age. Like most folks working for family-run farms, Corey's days were filled with back-breaking work, dirt under his fingernails and a sense of accomplishment when the job was done.

Corey's childhood and farming experiences taught him something special; something he would never forget — the value of conservation and how the interplay between wildlife and habitat relies on humans to be stewards for our environment.

When Corey left home, he landed at Western Michigan University where he graduated with a degree in biology. From there, he worked at an engineering firm and completed several seasonal stints with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources before landing a job at Pierce Cedar Creek Institute as stewardship manager.

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Something was missing for Corey, though, and he couldn't shake the feeling that he was destined for more.

After five years working for Pierce Cedar Creek Institute, Corey decided to leave the nine-to-five grind, hang up his gloves and chaps and pursue his passion for carving duck decoys full time. Cedar Run Decoy Company was born.

Passion meets conservation

For Corey and his business partner, Boyd Culver, the model couldn't just include profit margins, advertising, marketing and growth — it needed to include something deeper and more tangible to the world they operate in. The business not only needed to thrive and grow, but it also needed to give back.

So, as Corey had done throughout his career, he decided that the resource, wildlife and conservation were worthy recipients of his hard-earned profits and time.

Since its founding in 2019, Cedar Run Decoy Company has donated five percent of its profits each year to North American waterfowl conservation. This money has been used to conduct research, plant and maintain wild rice and put up nesting tubes and boxes for ducks, among many other things.

When asked if he thought his five-percent donation would make an impact, Corey shrugged and said that folks should give what they can and lead by example.

"My five percent might be small potatoes, but if I can get others to support conservation and donate money or time, there's no telling where the snowball effect might end," Corey said. "The conservation community holds the keys to better habitat and more wildlife in their hands; they just need to figure out how to unlock the potential."

Cedar Run Decoys' conservation ethic doesn't end with donating money to worthy waterfowl causes, though. Corey and friends strive to use sustainable practices and materials such as cork, non-toxic paint and small-batch production methods.

"We aren't and never plan to be a full-scale production facility," Corey said. "My sweat and energy is poured into each one of these decoys, and I hope people understand that each decoy is bettering Michigan's conservation landscape."

Many of Cedar Run Decoys products are also WILDwood certified — meaning that the wood is sourced from wildlife habitat restoration projects. In fact, some trees Corey fell himself have been used for various decoys.

"We are all connected to our natural resources, Michigan's outdoor heritage and the species that share these spaces," Corey said. "Knowing where our wood comes from is just one more part of this connectivity that keeps the conservation wheel turning."

Left: A Cedar Run wood duck decoy proving its worth. Photo: Boyd Culver. Above: Corey Lucas picks up his Cedar Run blocks after a day of hunting in New York. Photo: Kaj Carlson

'Gunning Decoys'

While many hand-carved decoys nowadays serve as mantle mainstays, that was never Corey's intention for Cedar Run blocks.

"These are gunning decoys," Corey said. "They are meant to be thrown around, used, shot, repainted and passed down through generations."

At $165 to $200 a piece, these aren't your standard production line plastics that so many of us use for a season or two and pitch. These decoys are meant to be treasured and used season after season for a lifetime.

Corey purposefully doesn't use elaborate paint schemes sometimes donning decorative collector decoys.

"I want folks to be able to repaint these decoys themselves and service them for the life of their hunting career," Corey said. "Purposefully not using intricate painting techniques helps the customer feel like they are a part of the process when they need to spruce up their Cedar Run decoy."

Each decoy takes Corey two and a half to three hours to carve. The process starts with a sheet of cork about four inches thick. The sheet is then divided and cut into blocks before the magic begins.

The cork blocks begin to take shape as Corey starts with a band saw removing the corners and

SINCE ITS FOUNDING IN 2019, CEDAR RUN DECOY COMPANY HAS DONATED FIVE PERCENT OF ITS PROFITS EACH YEAR TO NORTH AMERICAN WATERFOWL CONSERVATION.

big chunks of material. From there, draw knives and rasps with different grits are used to help shape the decoy and make the gentle curvatures.

The ordered process by which Corey works is methodical and calculated. Each tool serves a little different purpose and is meant for altering the cork in a different way. Certain rasps are tapped before others because of their grit, and Corey uses small tools to fine-tune the details like a surgeon with a scalpel.

At the end of the day, each of these decoys are different and unique. Corey said there is starting to be some interest among collectors about his decoys but that he is steadfast to his commitment to produce top-tier, usable, gunning decoys — the kind only true fowlers can appreciate.

What's next?

Much of Cedar Run Decoys business has been built on the backs of one- or two-decoy orders. That doesn't mean Corey and friends can't handle bulk orders, though.

In the last few months, Corey has shipped out a rig of 40 decoys to the East Coast. And he was working on an order of 115 destined for the marshes of Ohio in June. Small orders are common, Corey said, but there seems to be more and more demand for larger orders as the business grows.

From black ducks to wood ducks to divers, Cedar Run Decoys span the gamut of duck species you will see in Michigan. They also sell charcuterie boards and an assortment of swag to help support the small, locally-owned company and conservation in Michigan.

Corey hopes that Cedar Run Decoy Company continues to grow and that the next generation of waterfowlers will continue to place an emphasis on the heritage of hand-carved gunning decoys.

When this all started, the company outlined five- and 10-year plans. As of June 2021, Corey said the company is almost where they had hoped to be in five years — three years ahead of schedule.

"The future is a tough thing for anyone or any business to predict, but I think if we remain true to who we are and continue to turn out a quality product rooted in conservation, we will be just fine," Corey said. "At the end of the day, this is all about the resource, the habitat and the fowl that drives me to want to leave the state of conservation a little better than I found it."

Visit cedarrundecoys.com to learn more about this Plainwell, Michigan company.

Corey Lucas talks with Shaun McKeon and the author at his shop in Plainwell, Michigan. Each decoy Corey carves takes two and a half to three hours to carve, and decoys at various stages of the production process are on display in his shop.

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Memories of Upland Michigan

By Perry Masotti

Almost 10 years ago, I made my way to the Upper Peninsula for the first time. It has become an annual October journey. It seems that my days in Michigan are primarily rainy, though sometimes such weather forces a needed rest for man and dog. The grey wet presents a contrast to those colorful October days. I have banked many memories of friends and their dogs sharing the coverts of Michigan, and I memorialize much of it in photos.

In 2013, I spent several soggy days tent camping on the central Upper Peninsula. It was a stick-a-pin-in-the-map deal. My GSP, Aspen, is gone, but I remember hunting in steady rain with a fit young shorthair who stuck a point against a bank of firs at the edge of a clearing. Upon my approach, five grouse exploded up and into the dark evergreen forest. I chose a bird and hail-Married a shot. I was certain I'd missed, but Aspen followed up. I waited in the rain impatiently. Damned if he didn't return with a wet partridge. A late afternoon break in the rain gave me a chance to turn that bird into a camp stove meal augmented by Craisins and mushrooms.

Once, a group representing West Virginia, New York and Michigan converged on a wet day on a small, hardscrabble road on the Upper Peninsula. Like spokes on a wheel, we set off in different directions into the cool drizzle. Ronnie Phillips and his son, Justin, terrorized the birds to the north. Some guys headed west, and I headed south with Rick Affuso and his lovely American Brittany, Maggie. I remember the rocky terrain and slippery footing on the red and yellow carpet of newly fallen leaves. I recall wrongly trusting the moss that belied the treacherous footing of wet stone just beneath.

As we attempted to clamber uphill, traction was absent. The moss gave way underfoot like plowed snow and took some spills. We had some woodcock points. I don't recall who bagged one of the woodcock we encountered. In the light drizzle, I was grateful for my waxed cotton coat as I worked fast to photograph the outing's small harvest with my camera.

"I was certain I'd missed, but Aspen followed up. I waited in the rain impatiently. Damned if he didn't return with a wet partridge."

Poor, bedraggled Maggie looked unhappy. The rain offered a reprieve and early afternoon found the crew gathered around David Kuritzky's bird hunting truck known as "The Sweet Rig." It's fitted with refrigeration and power to run a slow cooker. Accompanied by shorthairs, wirehairs, setters and brittanys, a mess of soggy fellas gathered there to swap clothes and eat sandwiches and hot soup.

Former New Yorker Kyle Warren and his strain of Llewellin setters relocated last year to the UP. Those are among the most talented grouse dogs I've encountered. My hunts with him are fast-paced, as Kyle's style is to keep pace with his dogs. I recall following him and his senior boy, Duncan, into dark fir and cedar swamps. At least twice, I sank on one leg to the crotch in holes between cedar roots. That did not help me to keep up.

We followed Duncan as he trailed for hundreds of yards, ratcheting into a pointing stance and working forward until he locked up for good. Duncan's work produced a big swamp drummer. I walked behind two sister braces, uncanny and deadly in their work, pointing, slithering, trailing and honoring each

Dan Canedo stops mid-hunt to pose with his brittanys, Chestnut and Spruce.

other. Some of Kyle's Llews are spritely and bound silently and quickly through the coverts. My mind's eye sees a tiny blue belton in an aspen stand. More airborne than not, she suddenly sticks point, elbows are jammed backward and her tail is curved back over her head. Her muzzle lifted for grouse fragrance and her eyes were trance-like yet twinkly. She remains in my mind posed among green with golden beaked hazel leaves floating above her head.

One morning in the Western UP, I headed out with my black GSP, Elk, into a young aspen cut. In five minutes, I had my limit of woodcock and attempted to leave the covert. It seemed, however, that the woodcock had dropped in ahead of the previous night's crystalline skim coat of snow. I spent an hour going from point to point, bumping birds on my way. I tried to get out of the covert, but Elk wasn't on board with that effort. Again and again, the Lovetts hawk scream sounded, and I threaded myself between dog hair aspen stems and pulled myself free from blackberry canes to

Dennis Stachewicz poses during a hunt with his German shorthaired pointer, Maggie — Gretchen's granddaughter.

honor his point and flush woodcock. We moved over 50 woodcock in that short period.

Parts of the Upper Peninsula remain relatively wild. Once I traveled east on the UP to meet Dennis Stachewicz. The trip should have taken 90 minutes, but I got distracted by a phone call and missed my turn. My truck GPS quit on me, so I attempted to navigate by phone map app. But there was no signal. I couldn't call for directions. As it got dark, I went by feel and gazetteer. My "feel" was off and the gazetteer showed a needed left and right turn as a straight road. I spent several hours repeating the same loop over and over. I drove three times through a sketchy submerged road. For a while, I was sure I was going to sleep in the truck until morning but, somehow, before I ran out of fuel, I escaped the circuit and came to a paved road forty miles west of my destination. It's funny now, but it wasn't then. I've been told that there is almost no signage there, and "that's how Yoopers like it."

Dennis' Aspen Thicket GSPs are great bird-sticking grouse dogs. Dennis and I have spent many days together in

the coverts, and I recall hunting behind his 14-year-old "Iron Maiden," Gretchen. We were hunting a trail through mixed hardwoods and some firs. Instinct and experience animated the old girl before she nailed a point on a corner. We moved in and a grouse sprang up like a teal and we tag-teamed it just before it could level off and skim the treetops. The satisfied old girl held her bird in her old-dog muzzle with cloudy eyes.

My upland friends tend to appreciate the spiritual side of the upland life, and I am more simpatico with those not obsessed with a bag limit. This was exemplified by an afternoon on which David, Rick and I followed Rick's Britt, Spruce, as we worked a vast field sprinkled with stands of twisted oak edged by dogwood. Beyond these, we saw distant borders comprising mostly gold and scarlet as the land sloped down and away to the softer and wetter ground. We chatted as we progressed, laughing easily, guns open on our shoulders. Spruce pointed several grouse and many woodcock, and we took our time going from point to point. I don't recall if we killed a bird.

Northern Michigan is a diverse place. From the western UP, bordering Wisconsin, and the central UP and across to the Mackinac Bridge and onto the northern half of the Lower Peninsula, there is great variety in terrain and flora. The degree to which wildness remains varies, from fear of wolf encounter in the UP, to whether one will encounter other hunters in "my coverts," in the UP or lower. The culture varies substantially depending on where one finds oneself. Clearly, one can get lost in some places and only wish that they could in others. The possibility of birds in the forests is constant. Apart from that, the variety is excellent. Any autumn in which I don't spend time in beautiful Michigan will be less full.

Top: Eric Affuso poses with his Brittany and a harvested woodcock. All photos: Perry Masotti

From ‘ballot box biology’ to professional wildlife management:

Prop G’s legacy has to be protected

By Chris Lamphere

Imagine a world where hunting and fishing regulations are established through a process similar to electing a public official, where grandstanding, hyperbole and backroom deals aren’t just common practice but are virtually the only path to success.

In 2021, fresh off one of the most divisive election cycles in recent history, it’s easy to imagine how nightmarish such as system would be, but 25 years ago in 1996, it was how things were done in Michigan and elsewhere.

To change a game law in Michigan, someone could simply collect enough signatures and place a referendum on the ballot for a public vote.

One such referendum was Proposal D, which sought to prohibit the use of bait piles and dogs for hunting black bear — techniques seen as cruel and unsporting by most of the proposal’s supporters, although the initial impetus behind the referendum was a landowner who had a problem with bear hounds trespassing on his property.

Similar types of proposals involving other game species were placed before voters in several other states that year, most of which were backed by animal rights groups energized by an unsuccessful attempt in California to repeal the ban on hunting mountain lions in the state.

Bob Garner, then-host of the television program “Michigan Out of Doors,” said the proposal terrified many in the bear hunting community for the obvious reason that locating a bear in the wild without bait or dogs is extremely difficult and could very well have led to a massive drop off in harvest success rates.

The larger issue that galvanized hunting and angling groups against Proposal D, however, was how wildlife and habitat management efforts all over the country were increasingly being dictated by special interest groups and radical activists rather than by experts in the field.

Enter Proposal G, which was drafted by a large and diverse coalition of conservation groups led by Michigan United Conservation Clubs, Michigan Bear Hunters Association, Safari Club International and others known collectively as Citizens for Professional Wildlife Management (CPWM).

Proposal G sought to vest exclusive authority for all hunting regulations, including bear

hunting, in the Michigan Natural Resources Commission. Crucially, Proposal G would also require the NRC to utilize "principles of sound scientific management" in regulating all game hunting and require public meetings prior to the issuance of any orders by the NRC.

Garner said Proposal G would effectively remove the politics and emotion from any consideration about game policies in Michigan but as supporters of the proposal quickly discovered, convincing the public to go along with the idea was going to be an uphill battle.

Uniting for a common cause

Dennis Knapp worked for MUCC in 1996 and was heavily involved in the discussions surrounding both Prop D and Prop G.

Months before the election, Knapp remembers that CPWM conducted phone surveys to gauge public opinion about the use of bait and dogs to hunt for bears. The results were grim: by a nearly two-to-one margin, people disapproved of both practices.

Thus, bear hunting became a focal point illustrating the difference between sound science and proven harvest technique versus how people with little knowledge of wildlife management felt about certain practices.

"We started to hone our messages," Knapp said. "That professional management was better than management by emotion, politics or whatever else."

Crafting the message was easy, but garnering support from the numerous disparate conservation groups to unite behind it would be a tall order.

To help bridge the divide between the fractured conservation groups in Michigan, CPWM brought in Ron Lundberg, an avid hunter and leader in Safari Club International.

"Ron was good at getting people to see the big picture," Knapp said.

While Proposal G of 1996 started as a safeguard against anti-hunters meddling in bear hunting regulations, it quickly transformed to shape Michigan's wildlife management practices for generations.

"To understand where each other was coming from. Ron was really critical for the campaign."

With Lundberg's help, CPWM hit the ground running, spreading their message far and wide through any medium at their disposal, including television and radio interviews, newspaper editorials and campaign signs with the simple and memorable slogan, "Proposal D is dangerous!"

The message highlighted the importance of relying on expertise when managing wildlife, with a special emphasis on bears.

"We helped the public understand that the bear population was healthy and vigorous," Knapp said. "That bears were in no danger of being depleted (as a result of baiting or hunting with dogs). Without these harvest methods (keeping the population in check), there would actually be more conflict between humans and bears."

Through a statewide raffle program where people could buy a $5 ticket and potentially win 40 acres and a log cabin in the Upper Peninsula, along with other fund raising efforts, Knapp said they were able to generate around $1.7 million for the campaign.

This groundswell of support for Prop G and against Prop D came at a time when the Prop D campaign was losing steam. Knapp said the timing of the campaign was very strategic and likely played a role in the eventual outcome of the election, which was a reversal of the survey conducted earlier in the year: Prop D failed by a margin of 61.7% to 38.3% while Prop G passed by a margin of 68.7% to 31.3%.

Legacy of Prop G

While the passage of Prop

G safeguarded the professional management of Michigan's wildlife and wild places for the time being, supporters remain vigilant of future challenges to the status quo.

After all, Prop G is a law just like any other, and laws change all the time.

"That vulnerability remains," Knapp said. "It's always a precarious process. That's why it's incumbent on hunters to maintain a good image and ethics … look how polarized everything is right now. Groups can spread almost any message they want on social media, and it can become very influential on people's opinions. I think (conservationists) have to be very careful about focusing on the things we all have in common and staying united because history can repeat itself."

Amy Trotter, executive director of MUCC, agreed that conservationists should remain in lockstep on certain issues, including the importance of leaving wildlife and habitat management decisions to the experts.

"MUCC membership has always been opposed to ballot box biology," Trotter said. "Prop G is one safeguard against that, and so are watchdog groups like MUCC. We don't believe (wildlife and habitat management decisions) should be one person's preference. We believe the NRC should be making those decisions. It's not a perfect system, but it's better than trying to convince politicians and educating the general public on activities they may never do."

Trotter also agreed wholeheartedly with Knapp that hunters, anglers, trappers and all other conservationists need to be very cognizant of the image and message they convey to the public; now more than ever, it seems, as mounting a defense to a measure like Prop D would probably be a lot more difficult and costly today.

"We can be our own worst enemies," Trotter said. "Someone can make a post or video that doesn't paint the rest of us in the most positive light, and it's so easy to take something like that and use it out of context. It never used to be that way."

For that reason, Trotter said the messaging campaigns of groups like the Michigan Wildlife Council will continue to be critical in coming years.

"They're keeping that buzz going about the positive attributes (of hunters, anglers and other conservationists)," Trotter said. "We need that positive valence when we come to these types of contentious ballot discussions."

Proposal D of 1996 sought to end hunting for bear in Michigan with bait and dogs. In response, MUCC and Citizens for Professional Wildlife Management, worked tirelessly to ensure that Proposal G of 1996 passed. Garnering almost 70 percent of the popular vote, Proposal G still drives scientific wildlife management to this day.

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After 14 Years

By Blake Sherburne

It took me 14 years to draw my Michigan bear tag. I started applying diligently in the Baldwin Bear Management unit when I was 23 years old and did not draw until I was 37. I did not even apply for the tag for most years, opting to apply for the preference point because I knew that I would not draw until I had thirteen or fourteen points. I also had the benefit of having a friend applying a year ahead of me. I knew that I probably would not draw until the year after he did.

I finally drew my tag in the year of our Covid, 2020. Thankfully, Covid did not seem to slow down the bear bait industry. A quick trip to Pinconning and a couple of hundred dollars netted me a 55-gallon barrel of strawberry-peach pie filling, four one-gallon pails of vanilla icing, a gallon of peanut cluster syrup and assorted other goodies. I bought a few pounds of popcorn and an air popper to give me something to spread all that sweet stuff out onto. Another friend who had recently drawn a bear tag pointed me towards a dumpster outside of a doughnut and sweets distributor. A little bit of embarrassing dumpster diving and I had several dozen boxes of just outdated doughnuts and cinnamon rolls. A small breakfast restaurant in Mesick gave me access to their grease bin, too. The plan was that even though the regulations only allow baiting for one month before the season opener, I was going to fatten those bears up good before I put my crosshairs on them. I was already dreaming of rendered bear fat and smoked bear hams.

When it comes to bear hunting, owning and operating a tree farm lends itself to several advantages.

The first is property. While not exactly common, bears are also not rare around our property, and I was excited to take a bear on our farm, hopefully. I set up three bear baits on our own property and three more on the property of friends and family. At every bait site, I buried a five-gallon pail — another advantage afforded me by owning a tree farm. There are always five-gallon pails around. Luckily, we have plenty of pails around because I quickly learned that bears like to enjoy the contents of a bait pail in environs of their own choosing. My first bait hits resulted in several missing pails, a couple of which I never did find. I drilled a hole through the bottom of each pail and ran a screw-type dog tie out through the hole and into the ground beneath the pail to help keep the bears from running off with my bait buckets. I topped the pails with a small piece of particleboard. I covered that with concrete blocks, firewood and some railroad tie cut-offs from a friend's sawmill in hopes that they would be heavy enough to keep the raccoons out and more than easy enough for a bear to flip off to get to the sticky goodness below.

Left top: Bears hit a bait Blake Sherburne placed. Left bottom: Sherburne's children, Jacoby and Llewelin, taste test the donuts before they are placed as bait. Bottom: Sherburne's children help bait a bear set in August 2020.

"At the first stop, they discovered that I had an entire pail of vanilla frosting. Luckily, it was a brand new pail because the sampling started as soon as it was opened. At the next site, they discovered the doughnuts. "

One of the delights of my bear-baiting season was taking my children with me. My son had just turned five and my daughter was two, about to turn three. At the first stop, they discovered that I had an entire pail of vanilla frosting. Luckily, it was a brand new pail because the sampling started as soon as it was opened. At the next site, they discovered the doughnuts. As I said above, they were only just out of date, maybe by a day or two. By the time we made it to site three, I could have baited in bears with just the powdered sugar wiped off their faces. After that, they were very excited to go bear baiting with dad, and wet wipes were added to my bear baiting supplies.

Four of my six bait sites started getting hit almost immediately. Sows and cubs showed up on four baits, turning my carefully crafted bait sites into excavation sites. Every site needed extensive repair nearly every time I returned. A boar, or at least a lone sow, finally showed up at the bait on a friend's property, only a couple hundred yards behind the sawmill from which I borrowed the railroad tie cut-offs. It appeared at noon one

One of Sherburne's bait sites after being hit by a bear.

day while the mill was running and crawling with employees.
As the season opener approached, I got more and more excited and the bait site hits got less and less frequently. I do not think I got a single picture of a bear the entire week before the season opener. I talked to every available source, including a guy running bears along a river I was floating in a raft with a friend fishing for trout. He had pushed a bear across the river just before we floated around the bend where we could have seen and was in the process of calling his dogs off. I got his number and called him during the season, but I needed to provide the active bait site from which to run the bear and I did not have a boar coming into any of mine. Another bear hunter I ran into told me that he had also had a tough time getting good bears to bait during the preseason, blaming the heavy mast crop in the area.

On the opener, I decided to take my five-year-old son with me. I knew it was not the greatest decision, but I also knew my first night would be my best night to get a shot at a bear with my son. I brought along his tablet and headphones, hoping that would keep him quiet. However, he is a very active five-year-old and does not yet possess the ability to keep quiet. The tablet worked for a while, but he could not keep from fidgeting with it and it kept tipping over. We were in the landowner's elevated box blind and the tablet was resting on the front bench where he could watch it and also keep an eye out the windows for critters. The first evening was very still. No wind for cover sound. Every time the tablet tipped over on its little stand it sounded like I was hitting a kick drum behind a rock band. And his little five-year-old voice has been trained well at daycare to rise above the surrounding noise. In the blind, it sounded like he was shouting. I felt like I could see the sound waves traveling out into the woods.

Needless to say, we did not see a bear that first night. I felt horrible, but my son was banished from the blind for the remainder of the season. It did not matter. I hunted every evening, but I never saw a bear. I think I only got one picture of a bear during season. They immediately showed up after season, though. A sow and two cubs even showed up at a former bait site on our farm while another tree grower was over digging spruce with skid steers and giant tree spades, loading semis with ball-and-burlapped Norway Spruce only about a 150 yards away. The bears must have had their calendars marked.

The highlight of my season was putting out bait with my kids, looking in the rearview mirror at their powdered sugar-covered faces in the backseat. I also got dozens of great pictures of bears and overweight raccoons, and even a bobcat stopped by a bait that I had fish carcasses at. It did not eat, but it made for a cool picture.

In recent seasons, the DNR has allocated about 50% more tags for the Baldwin area. I am going to start applying for my children as soon as I can, and hopefully, I will draw again before I am 50. Man, hard to think about being close enough to 50 to see it that way. When I looked in the mirror while bear baiting and saw the powdered sugar all over my face, I could have sworn I was still five.

Sherburne's son, Jacoby, goofs around during a bear-baiting trip.

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Habitat 101

By Jared Van Hees

Jared Van Hees is a passionate habitat manager and Michigan landowner with a strong drive to educate others. He is the founder of Habitat Podcast and a habitat consultant to private landowners across the Midwest. He has a bachelor's degree in entrepreneurship from Central Michigan University and is an avid sportsman who spends time introducing his young family to the outdoors.

It's getting very close to my favorite time of the year. The nights are beginning to cool, the days are getting shorter and the remaining stack of calendar pages is dwindling down. All of our sweat equity put forth, our valuable time spent, our precious money invested and our quality seed planted are coming to a head here on October 1. Deer season is virtually here, and my anticipation is running at an all-time high!

I am sure many of you are right there with me.

If you have been following along with my Habitat 101 column here in the magazine, you will know that I spend a lot of time helping my Land Plan clients with habitat management and food plots. I also spend time getting my own seed planted in the ground prior to October. This year, we have been blessed with a decent amount of Summer rainfall, which has benefited those that have planted spring food plots. While Mother Nature showed us some love early on, there are places here in Michigan where the crops we plant for deer and wildlife are struggling. This happens every year, and I am going to tell you how to overcome this obstacle. With a few simple tricks, we can turn your failed food plot around rather quickly, and at a minimum, provide some great attraction on your parcel this fall. You might even end up a food plot hero.

Food plot failure can take many different shapes. We will cover three common failures, and I will tell you the remedies I have learned and implemented for each one. The first and most often failure I run into is a lack of growth in your food plot. Bare spots or no growth at all sometimes happens. This can be a result of a couple of similar equations.

The common denominator is usually a severe lack of rain. Without proper rainfall or dew in the early mornings, seed germination may not happen. I always try to plant my food plots with a rainy day in the forecast. I tend to aim for a high-percentage precipitation day. If, for some reason, you didn't use a culti-packer after broadcasting your seed at planting, your soil may not be retaining the little moisture your plot may have received. That is the benefit of using that implement. Or what if your seed did germinate, but then Mother Nature threw us a dry spell? Well, that is out of our control and can knock back those young seedlings or even fry them up to a crisp. If this happens and you end up with bare spots or no forage, the next step may seem simple: add more seed. Not just any seed, though. I am referring to the easy germinating types that will grow in the bed of your pickup or in the cracks of your driveway if spilled. Winter wheat, cereal rye, buckwheat, oats, winter peas and an annual clover is a six-way mix I broadcast on top of the failing plot.

This is most effective when done directly in front of a rain shower, but many of these seeds will germinate in less-than-desirable conditions or rainfall. As far as the mix goes, I seed heavy. I mix 25 pounds each of winter wheat, cereal rye, buckwheat, oats and then top it off with 10 lbs. of winter peas and 10 pounds of clover for one acre. If you want to keep it

Food Plot Woes

simple, a 50/50 mix of winter wheat and cereal rye at 100-125 pounds per acre. I would put the first batch onto the ground in early September and then repeat this step once more a few weeks later. This isn't a new idea in the food plotting world, but a tried and true method with a few additions to quickly provide some quality forage on your failed food plot.

The second failure I have dealt with in the past comes when your food plot vegetation looks short, spindly or the leaves are even yellowing a bit. This can depend on the seed type. Stunted growth can be a result of a couple of different factors.

Planting too many brassicas or over-seeding your mix can create too much competition among seedlings, which often results in stunted and poor tonnage. This doesn't happen with every crop, but it is common in brassica plantings.

Jared Van Hees adds liquid fertilizer to the agitating boom sprayer before trying to reinvigorate a failing food plot.

The seeds are very small, which in turn makes it is easy to sail every seed in the bag into the air and onto your plot. Too much growth competition like this results in smaller bulb production, frail stems and less overall late-season tonnage/food. Reading the back of the seed bag and planting strictly to the recommended amount per acre is always a good idea and your solution. Your plot may not look like a total failure from seeding too heavily, but one can quickly lose out on additional food. Another stunted type attribute you may see is a yellowing of the leaves on some of your plants. This can mean too much rain, or more commonly, a lack of nutrients, among other things. If you notice this coloration, you may have a nitrogen deficiency. The way I remedy this situation is to apply either a granular fertilizer (46-0-0, also called Urea) or nitrogen-based foliar fertilizer to the already growing plants. Again, good rain can help wash the granular treatment into the soil and help avoid any damage from direct fertilizer contact. The foliar fertilizers out on the market these days are a safer bet and can be applied with a backpack sprayer as you navigate your food plot on foot, without difficulty. I usually error on the light side for this application to be safe. A simple boost of nitrogen can do a lot for a lacking or yellowing food plot.

The third and final failure I see among our client's food plots is the low number of deer using them. This happens when the trail cameras placed to monitor the food do not show any deer movement in daylight or very many deer feeding day or night, or possibly very little deer in the plot. The most common reason for this is pressure from

humans. We talk about pressure all the time on my Habitat Podcast as one of the most important things we, as property owners and hunters, can control.

Who hasn't found it very exciting to drive over to the property, hop out of the truck, walk across the food plot and check a trail camera once a week? I know I have. I've had friends of mine check their cameras even twice a week. Believe it or not, deer know when we are in their core area, and they can often smell our boot tracks up to two or three days after we stepped foot in that food plot. If you are checking cameras that often, consider the impact human pressure is having on your property and the deer. My remedy to this situation is the use of cellular trail cameras. There are many options out there today depending on your budget, and any of them will eliminate us stepping foot near our food plots to check cameras. Another remedy is to check your cameras just before a rain. For the most part, the following rain will wash our scent away and any sign of human intrusion. It is not as solid as the cellular trail cam option, but a good option nonetheless. You could also only check cameras on your way to the stand, as you will already be leaving scent behind at that time.

The third remedy to this failure is cover. If I have a food plot next to a road, and every car that drives by, slows down or stops to view the wildlife, the deer will eventually become nocturnal and stop using the food plot during daylight hours. In most occurrences, we want deer using these in the daylight when it is legal to hunt them. My solution to this problem is to create annual or perennial cover around your food to help our wildlife feel more secure while feeding. It will most likely be too late this year to solve the cover problem, but it is undoubtedly something we can add to our habitat to-do list for 2022. If you find yourself reading this Habitat 101 article and believe your food plots may be suffering from one or more of the failures discussed above, it is not too late. Take some time and observe. Find out what the actual issue at hand is, and let's treat it. I am here to help, so feel free to reach out. Mother Nature can throw us some curveballs come planting season. I find it extremely important to have a backup plan or two ready in the holster.

Above: Applying foliar fertilizer gives food plots a boost of nutrients. Below: An example of bare spots that can be fixed using the methods in this article.

Adapting to the food plot situation at hand is not something I've always known how to do. After years of trial and error, I can now say these failure remedies above could save your failed food plots and possibly your entire deer hunting season. I want you to be sitting in your stand this year feeling like a food plot hero.

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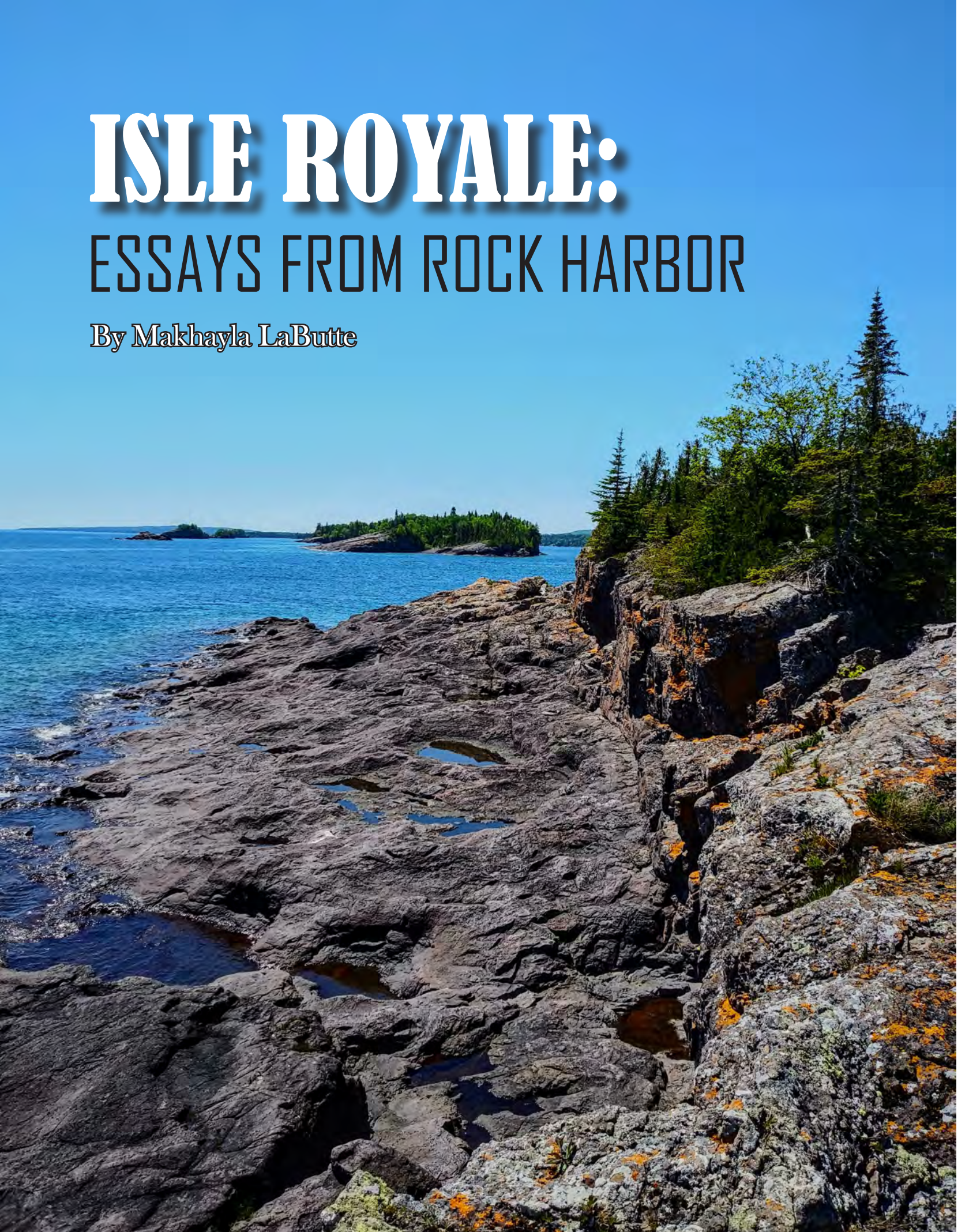
ISLE ROYALE:

ESSAYS FROM ROCK HARBOR

By Makhayla LaButte



Part 1: Raspberry Island

Minong

Isle Royale is the epitome of wilderness for many recreationists. Many are lured to the solitary and majestic archipelago, searching for a reprieve from civilization and a chance to truly immerse themselves in the north woods. However, not long ago, this island was the centerpiece of many different cultures and industries. Thus, the natural history of Isle Royale was heavily influenced by the human exploits and explorations of its lands and waters.

Although Isle Royale and its more than 450 islands were officially established as a national park in 1940, mining sites on the island have been dated back to Indigenous peoples from 4,500 years ago. The Ojibwe were among the first settlers of Isle Royale, and their strong ties to the island, its copper and other natural resources are not to be overlooked when understanding the history of the area and their culture. They call it Minong, roughly translated to "the good place," and they maintain a strong connection to the island to this day.

Word would eventually spread about the copper veins just beneath the surface of the island. As European settlement continued along the south shores of Lake Superior, more pressure was placed on the island by interested prospectors. John Houghton, Michigan's first state geologist, highlighted the element in a report that was published in the mid-1840s. So began the most significant and widespread modern copper mining efforts on Isle Royale.

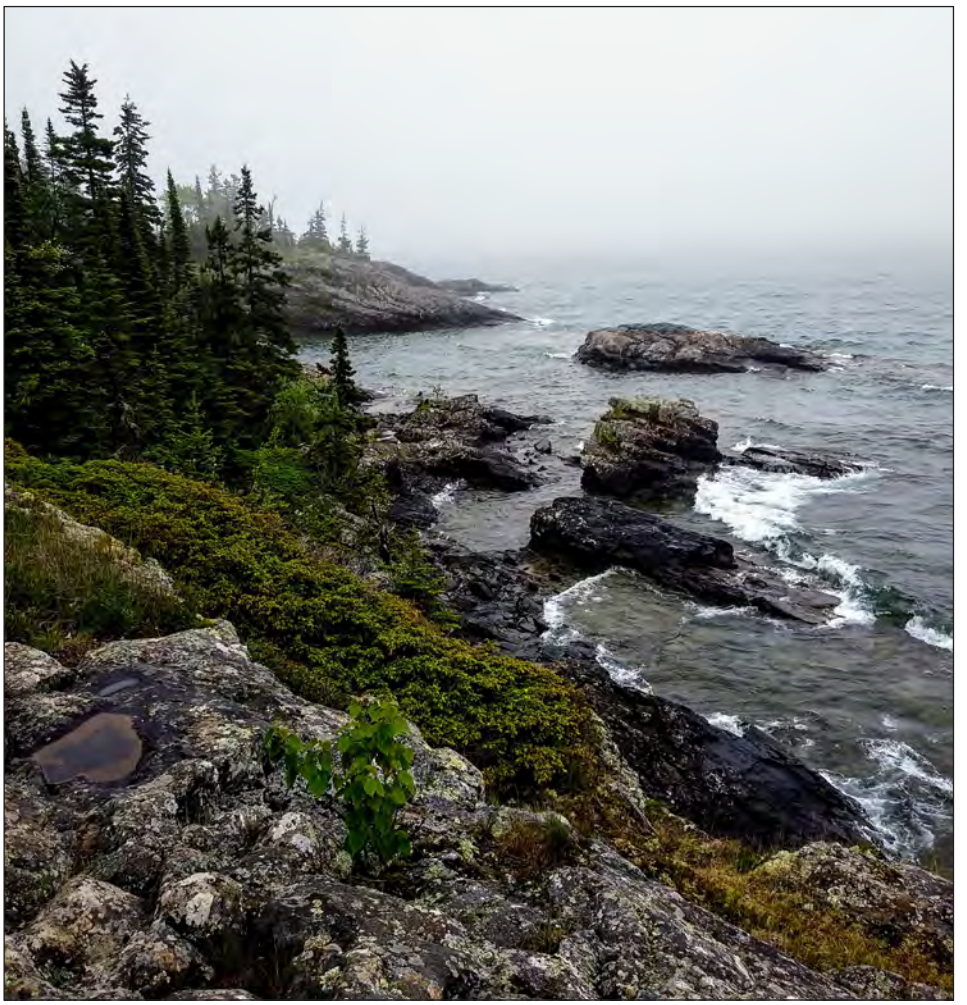
With this hungered quest for copper came landscape-wide clear-cutting, burning and the digging of pits. It was a boom and bust way of living, as copper veins were repeatedly discovered, mined and depleted.

Both subsistence and commercial fishing were also practiced extensively around and throughout Isle Royale by many peoples, sustaining tribal populations and other residents before growing into a commercial fishing industry. Commercial lumbering efforts were also attempted, but they were ultimately short-lived and yielded poor results as the forests were regularly subjected to disturbances like fires and severe storms. These economic pursuits failed, meeting the same fate as the mining industry that had put Isle Royale on the map.

Since the dwindling of the mining boom of the mid-1800s, tourism and the use of the island for recreation and leisure increased as more and more people were lured to the wild landscape.

In the early twentieth century, Isle Royale primarily became known for its tourism opportunities, and many of its popular coastal destinations were a mix of private cottages, hotels and fishing camps. However, a majority of the land on the island was still owned by the many mining companies that had sought profit there decades earlier. Now that the land was no longer as profitable for their pursuits, these companies were looking to sell their shares of acreage to other industries. As word spread among seasonal residents and visitors of the island about the possible sale of large portions of the island, they banded together and formed an organized effort to place Isle Royale in the hands of the federal government so

MUCC Habitat Volunteer Coordinator Makhayla LaButte visited Isle Royale for one week in June. Here she is pictured in front of the Rock Harbor sign with moose antler sheds.



The view from Stoll Trail on Raspberry Island provides breathtaking sights.

that its forests and waters would be preserved for future generations.

It was a combined effort of many local, private, tribal, state and federal entities that preserved the land as a national park. Today, Isle Royale National Park is fondly referred to as the U.S. national park with the least amount of annual visitors but the most return visitors.

I kept this chaotic history in mind as I boarded the Ranger III in Houghton, Michigan under ominous skies in early June. I would be but one of the thousands that would set foot on the island in 2021, but it was my hope that I would be challenged and inspired by the journey ahead of me.

First sight

All of the passengers on the Ranger III made their way outside the ferry cabin as we approached an ever-sharpening image of Isle Royale. What began as a smudge on the western horizon across Gichigami (Lake Superior) morphed into a brilliant and wild mix of forest and exposed bedrock. The surprisingly favorable weather we were greeted with made the great lake below us a vibrant reflecting glass of the archipelago we were now sailing within.

Isle Royale indeed, I thought, as I took in the rich colors and contrasts between the lazuli lake and the earthy tones of the land protruding from it. Though long out of service, the Rock Harbor Lighthouse seemed to beckon the Ranger III into the harbor as the sun shined brightly down upon it.

I stared across the water and soaked in the view as the lighthouse came in and out of focus as we passed by the small islands scattered throughout the passage. I wondered how many ships and fishing vessels the structure had protected with its light shining across Lake Superior or what the land looked like before it was constructed in the mid-nineteenth century. Did the original settlers of the island take the same route as us in their canoes?

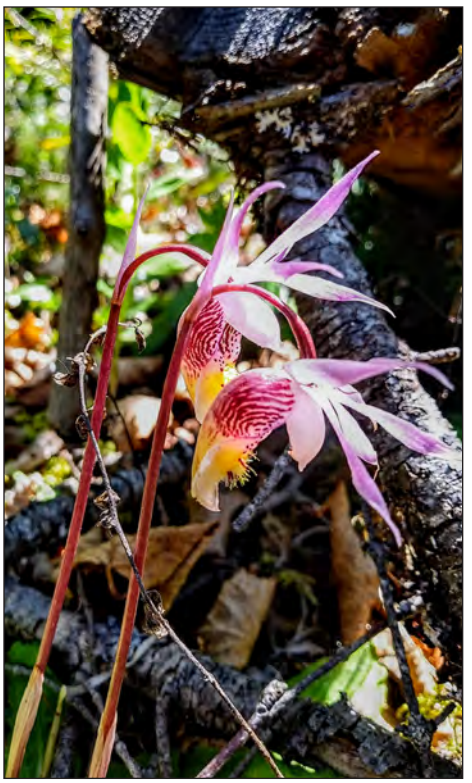
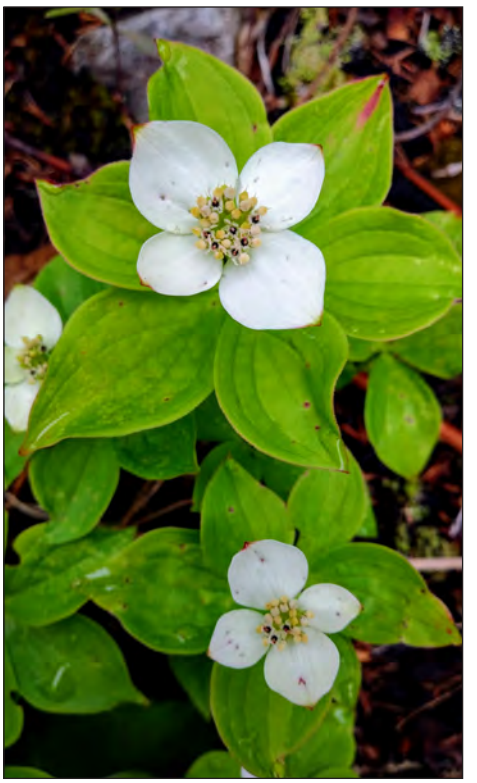
The camera shutters never ceased around me as I observed the landscape shift between rugged gray bedrock and dense forests. Meanwhile, common mergansers and common loons flew by us as the wake of the ferry interrupted their time on the water. Although I planned on taking a few photographs on the trip, the goal was to be as present as possible and take in the sights, sounds and smells of the island. As cliché as it sounded, I genuinely wanted to be in the moment.

A splotch of neon above the water pulled my eyes away from the avian passersby. Two hikers in bright gear stopped on their journey to wave at us as we passed closer to the shoreline, where the Rock Harbor Trail wound through impressive cliffs and forests. A flurry of hands waved back, and soon they were gone as the trail guided them away from us and the ferry pressed forward toward the nearby dock.

Raspberry Island

"Does anyone have a sharp pencil?" asked Janet Marr, botanist and instructor of the Isle Royale and Keweenaw Parks Association (IRKPA) botany workshop I was attending. Our group was scattered around a patch of Canadian bunchberry (Cornus canadensis) on Raspberry Island. By the time I finished my sketch in my notebook, it was too late, and she had instead found a spruce needle for the job.

I got low to the ground where Janet was hovering over one of the bunchberry plants, joining other classmates as we carefully observed what she was doing. While Canadian bunchberry is a


These are three unique species of flora that can be found on Isle Royale. From left to right: fairy slipper orchid, Canadian bunchberry and bird's-eye primrose. All photos: Makhayla LaButte

relatively common plant and is deceivingly simple in appearance, it holds a unique record.

"Eventually, the sun began to sink low on the western horizon, casting a warm glow on the boreal forest we were within and igniting the old man's beard (a lichen, Usnea spp.) that seemed to hang from every limb of the trees."

We were, in fact, gathered around the fastest plant on Earth. The tiny flowers clumped within the white leaves surrounding them open and release pollen in less than half of a millisecond. When close to the plant, you can actually feel a poof of air hit you when it happens. After Janet successfully demonstrated the phenomenon, I decided to try it, getting low and close to the small flower heads. I gently poked the tip of my pencil to the center of one of them. Nothing.

Another. Nothing.

Another. Poof.

I reflexively jumped back with a grin, and others quickly tried to mimic the experience before we moved on to observe other plants of interest.

More rare and fascinating flora became known to us as we made the loop around Raspberry Island. A fragile bog boasted carnivorous flora like pitcher plants (Sarracenia purpurea) and round-leaved sundew (Drosera rotundifolia). The rocky shoreline of the island also hosted the carnivorous common butterwort (Pinguicula vulgaris), the showy bird's-eye primrose (Primula mistassinica) and the elegant northern paintbrush (Castilleja septentrionalis). And, not to be forgotten, the coveted sight of fairy slipper orchids (Calypso bulbosa) greeted us further along on one of the trails.

Scribbled notes and sketches filled my notebook, and the pages kept filling up as we came upon more and more species. Janet never had to think for more than a few seconds before making a positive identification, and we all appreciated her extensive knowledge and ability to blend what many would consider dull facts into engaging discussions about the ecological functions of each species and its placement on the landscape.

Eventually, the sun began to sink low on the western horizon, casting a warm glow on the boreal forest we were within and igniting the old man's beard (a lichen, Usnea spp.) that seemed to hang from every limb of the trees.

We reluctantly took our leave of Raspberry Island, and the water taxi delivered us back to the Rock Harbor area of the main island.

The journey was only beginning, and something already told me that one visit to Isle Royale was not going to be enough for my lifetime.

To be continued in the Winter 2021 edition of Michigan Out-of-Doors magazine.

RISING STARS of CONSERVATION:

Kara Cook

By Charlie Booher

From partnerships to access, top advisor helps shape environmental and conservation law

In response to Mr. Alan Campbell's Legends of Conservation column, the Michigan Out-of-Doors editorial staff sought to highlight individuals who might someday make their way into those pages. The Rising Stars in Conservation column seeks to introduce readers to the next generation of natural resource conservation professionals, sharing their experiences, their voices, their ambitions and their outlook on the future of the field. Leaders today look different, hold different positions and have been trained differently than traditional conservationists and they are worthy of an introduction.

Growing up in Lansing, Kara Cook spent much of her time surrounded by the city and municipal parks around our state's capital. However, she had the privilege of escaping into the outdoors through her mother's love of the Lake Michigan beach front and visiting family in the Upper Peninsula (U.P.). Like many Michigan residents, Kara's family spent their holiday vacations north of the Mackinac Bridge, where she enjoyed exploring the vast swaths of wooded timber and rocky shorelines of the U.P.

"Spending time in the U.P. as a kid set the stage for me to care about Michigan's natural resources and wild spaces," Cook said. "Anyone who has spent time in the U.P. — and especially those who live there — can tell you that it's a really special place."

This is the way that many citizens of the Great Lakes State experience nature and the outdoors, but it doesn't always inspire the kind of passion that Kara developed. Today, she serves as senior advisor on energy & environment to Gov. Whitmer. However, growing up, she didn't intend to pursue natural resources or an environmental policy career. As a political science major, she intended to work in politics and policymaking but hadn't quite found her niche.

During her final semester at Grand Valley State University, Cook began interning for the Blandford Nature Center in Grand

Rapids. Despite working on their development and marketing staff, she found herself spending cool spring nights looking for salamanders, hiking on warm summer days on many of Lake Michigan's sandy dunes or exploring the many lakes, rivers and streams of Western Michigan. She also experienced an interesting crossroad at Blandford — a natural area in the heart of one of Michigan's largest metropolitan areas and visitors, mainly younger children, who had never had the opportunity to experience the outdoors before. Her colleagues delivered hands-on educational programs daily, and Kara was able to see the genuine impacts that it had on their visitors.

"Seeing school buses full of kids arriving day after day to experience nature, often for the first time, encouraged me to focus on equitable access to the outdoors," Cook said. "Nearly every day I think about the disparities of access that exist among Michiganders in different areas of the state and that reality has informed the way I approach my day-to-day work and my values as an environmentalist."

Kara's experiences in the outdoors dovetailed nicely with her previous experiences as an intern on the campaign trail and in the Statehouse for then-Rep. Winnie Brinks (D-Grand Rapids). In this role, she found her real passion: policymaking.

"While I think campaign work and electing the right candidates are critical to sound policy outcomes, after that summer in Lansing, I found that after working in policymaking — through all three branches of government — was where I wanted to dedicate my time and energy," Cook said. "It was also very apparent to me that interacting with decision-makers at this level was the best place for me to have an impact."

She knew that the best way to do something about her passion for the environment was in the halls of power in Lansing. When a position became available with the League of Conservation Voters (LCV), Kara knew that she had to make her move.

At LCV, Kara served as the government affairs manager, where she actively coordinated a broad portfolio of issues relating to land, air and water conservation, as well as governance and democracy more broadly. She was responsible for LCV's acclaimed "legislative scorecard" and accountability programs for the governor and the state Supreme Court in her time there.

"With the risks posed by the pandemic, hiking, biking, hunting, fishing and paddling became important outlets for residents of the state who were looking to stay safe and healthy, but also have something to do."

"I'm really proud of the work that I was able to do with LCV," Cook said, "and I'm glad that I get to continue building on this work and the knowledge that I gained there."

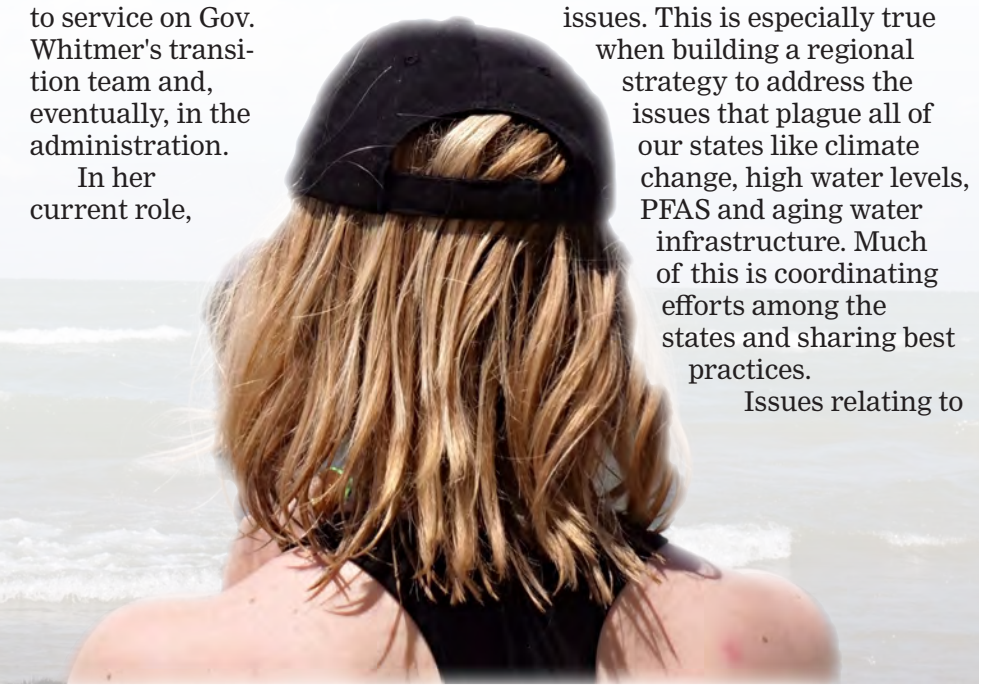
After three years in this position, Kara was recruited to service on Gov. Whitmer's transition team and, eventually, in the administration.

In her current role, Kara is in a position of coordination and collaboration. She works daily with the senior staff of the Departments of Natural Resources (DNR) and Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE) to advance the priorities of the administration on important policy issues like clean water, renewable energy and dam safety — all in the context of Michigan's changing climate. To this end, she organizes and coordinates the state's climate work, which, among other topics, works to incorporate the contributions of working and natural lands into Michigan's climate solutions. Cook recognizes that a wide range of needs must be balanced in moving towards a more sustainable system of infrastructure — including the needs of fish and wildlife.

"Acting on climate, protecting our waters and ensuring access to public lands and the species that live on them is critical to our way of life in Michigan," Cook said. "Whether I'm working on siting renewable energy or ensuring equitable land use, all of my work is interconnected."

A great deal of her time goes towards managing efforts within the state, but Kara also works closely with other states in the Great Lakes region and with national leaders in natural resource policy to address these issues. This is especially true when building a regional strategy to address the issues that plague all of our states like climate change, high water levels, PFAS and aging water infrastructure. Much of this is coordinating efforts among the states and sharing best practices.

Issues relating to



public land and access are central to nearly every aspect of Kara's work — and her passion for access that began at the Blandford Nature Center in Grand Rapids still shines through. Recently, she has been working on upgrading infrastructure on state lands, especially as people were clawing for recreational opportunities during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Public land is extremely important to me both personally and professionally, especially over the last year," Cook said. "With the risks posed by the pandemic, hiking, biking, hunting, fishing and paddling became important outlets for residents of the state who were looking to stay safe and healthy, but also have something to do. I'm glad that so many people were able to spend time on public lands in the last year and a half, but it has also raised several important questions about how we manage, maintain and plan for the use of these lands.

Now is the time to continue to invest in these resources."

If you haven't noticed by now, Kara carries a huge portfolio for just one person. She couldn't do it all without several key partnerships.

"I could not do what I do without the thousands of state employees, including the talented staff at EGLE and DNR, and outside experts and advocates," Cook told me. "Michigan has some of the most talented individuals in the energy and environment space."

When asked about her next steps, Kara told me that she is

focused on her current work but looks forward to a time when she might better balance her work with time outdoors.

"For better or for worse, the last few years have been incredibly busy for me," Cook said. "I'm really proud of the work that I've been able to do, but I'm also really looking forward to finding a better balance between my work and the things I enjoy doing outside of the office."

Kara had similar advice for future environment and natural resource professionals. She added that people looking to enter this field must do their homework and know the legal, political, social, and academic sides of their working issues and build confidence in themselves.

"Most people, especially younger women like myself, have difficulties being taken seriously," Cook told me. "While I was working for LCV, I was often mistaken for an intern or a volunteer, which was really discouraging for me. It took me a long time and a lot of work to build up enough confidence and conviction to overcome that."

From an early age, Kara Cook could be found venturing into rivers and streams and onto dunes throughout Michigan's two peninsulas.

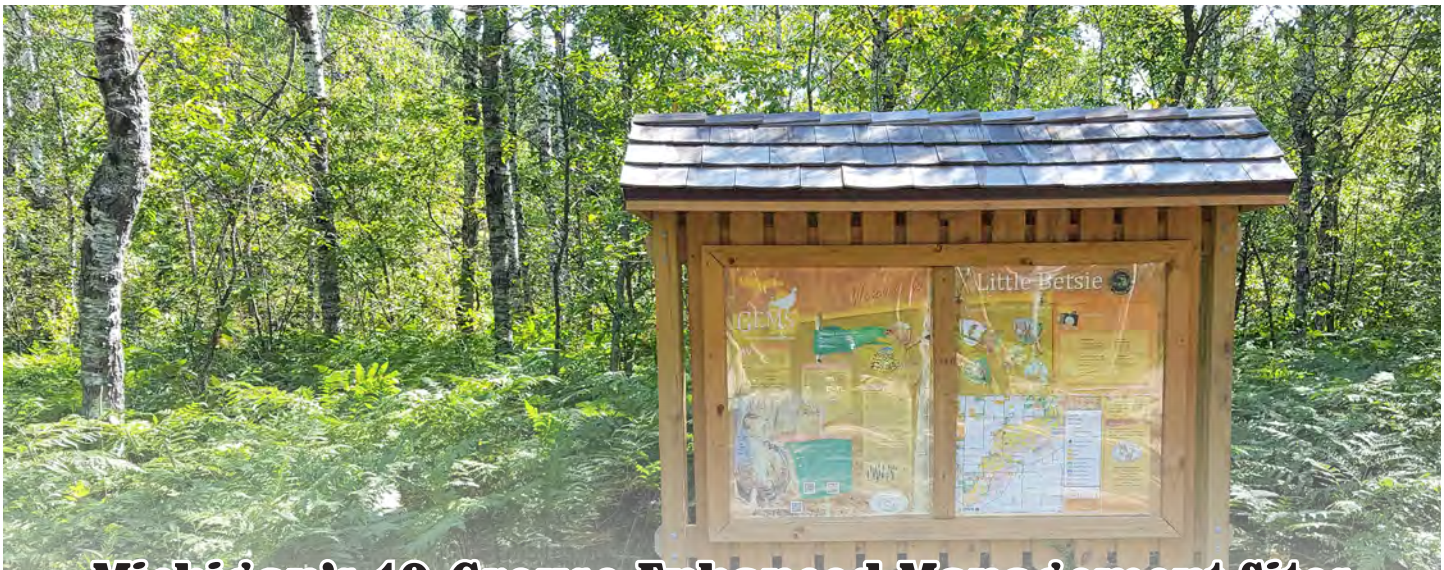
She also recognized that her most recent work environments have helped inform her position in the broader environmental policy arena.

"I have been incredibly fortunate to work for a team of very capable women," Cook said. "Working under the most diverse executive team and cabinet in Michigan's history has given me the chance to absorb the experiences of people who think and work differently from myself. This has been immensely beneficial to me and my service to the people of Michigan."

Insight from Kara's career is important for all of us to consider and incorporate as we work to move the field of natural resource conservation forward and ensure that it is relevant, open and accessible for all Michiganders.

In my conversation with Kara, I found myself gravitating towards a John Muir quote: "When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the Universe." While the original quote is about a natural ecosystem, it is equally applicable to a political or policy ecosystem. Everything is connected. In the current administration, Kara is the person who figures out how everything is hitched together, brings all the parties together and plans for moving the whole thing forward — and she is well equipped for the task.

Charlie Booher is a former MUCC State Conservation Policy Fellow and is currently a graduate student at the University of Montana.



Michigan's 19 Grouse Enhanced Management Sites (GEMS) offer premier bird hunting opportunities

Sponsored by the Michigan Wildlife Council

They're called GEMS for good reason.

Bursting with young aspen, these GEMS – formally known as Grouse Enhanced Management Sites – are 19 treasured tracts of forest in northern Michigan and the Upper Peninsula intensively managed by the state Department of Natural Resources to ensure a brighter future for wildlife like ruffed grouse, American woodcock and many other native species.

"With the help of hunters and partners, the DNR has developed and maintained these GEMS on state land to give folks new locations to explore Michigan's world-class upland game bird hunting in the fall and winter, as well as excellent birding and wildlife viewing in the spring and summer," said Rachel Leightner, DNR wildlife outreach coordinator.

Ruffed grouse are somewhat larger than pigeons and live their entire lives in wooded areas. They thrive in what's known as young forest: immature aspen stands and brushy areas that protect nesting grouse and provide an ample, year-round food supply.

But in the last century, as Michigan forests matured and land was overtaken by urban development, their numbers began to decline. However today, thanks to scientifically based habitat management, the bird's population can often be readily restored.

Enter GEMS.

Teamwork makes it happen

The DNR kicked off its innovative GEMS program in 2014. Its goal was to turn thousands of acres of decent state land for grouse, woodcock and other young forest wildlife into excellent habitat.

The DNR and its local, state and federal partners, as well as private landowners and conservation and hunting groups, work together to create healthy, productive tracts of young forest through timber harvesting; planting native shrubs, crops and trees; controlled burning; and other techniques that help upland birds, mammals, reptiles and insects.

Within three years, the land is usually a thriving habitat for young forest species.

The Little Betsie GEMS near Thompsonville in northwest Michigan's Benzie County is one of those treasured sites.

The Ruffed Grouse Society's Le Grand Traverse chapter plays an integral role in helping to manage the land. Its members have volunteered countless hours planting over 300 American hazelnut shrubs and other vegetation since the site was established in 2015 within 4,100 acres of state land.

"We've already seen amazing regeneration there and it's only going to keep getting better for ruffed grouse and other species in the years to come," said Paul Huffman, Le Grand Traverse chapter member and longtime volunteer.

The Little Betsie GEMS offers plenty of room for new hunters, families or folks who live in the city and need a place to hunt. It's also a great destination in spring and summer for birding and hiking.

"It's a real prize in northern Michigan," Leightner said.

Nearly all 19 GEMS are equipped with extensive walking trails, parking lots and site maps for easy navigation. The DNR's interactive website (MI.gov/GEMS) helps hunters locate the GEMS and view the trails, topography and timber types at each site. There's also information about local restaurants, hotels and stores that provide discounts to hunters who show their

base licenses.

"The maps and informational signs are all tools to educate folks and learn about grouse hunting," Huffman said.

'The original conservationists'

Like other Michigan game species, ruffed grouse and woodcock are successfully managed through carefully regulated hunting seasons in addition to habitat conservation.

"Michigan sportsmen and sportswomen have a long history of safeguarding wildlife like grouse, woodcock, elk and turkey," said Nick Buggia, chair of the Michigan Wildlife Council. "They truly are the original conservationists."

Hunters and anglers do far more than support conservation philosophically – they also back it financially. Sportsmen, through the purchase of hunting and fishing licenses, fund the bulk of the state's conservation and wildlife management activities.

Volunteers from the Ruffed Grouse Society's Le Grand Traverse Chapter plant small shrubs and bare root white oaks to support a variety of wildlife at the Little Betsie GEMS near Traverse City. Photo Credit: Brenna Huffman

"Together we can continue to conserve Michigan wildlife like the ruffed grouse and preserve our outdoor heritage for future generations," Buggia said.

DNR biologists predict great hunting and wildlife viewing conditions this year at the Little Betsie GEMS.

"Spring was very early and very dry, so the assumption is that brood success has been very good this year," Leightner said. "Canada geese and wild turkey hatchlings were observed early in the spring, likely due to the warm and dry spring. That's a good indicator that grouse and woodcock broods have done well, too."

LEGENDS of CONSERVATION:

Ray Brown

By Alan Campbell

Who answers their phone with a sincere, "How may I help?" Every time?

That would be Ray Brown, who was dealt a curveball in life that he keeps knocking out of the park. The sports analogy seems appropriate for a Paralympic world record holder, state champion wheelchair basketball player and gold medalist marksman.

While indeed an inspiring competitive record, it's in the outdoor sports that Brown has left a mark. Not in his success, but with the joy for life he's inspired in others.

"I have no idea how many people we've taken out hunting," said Brown from a table at the Deerfield Inn near Lapeer. "But that's not the point. I'm more interested in the guy who couldn't look at us in the face when we started talking with him. He didn't want any help, and he didn't want to do anything. Now he's out hunting on his own. If you can develop a person to that point, everybody wins."

Brown and the Wheelin 457 organization he formed are legends throughout Michigan. The nonprofit's logo shows a person in a wheelchair shooting a rifle across the state.

It's an accurate depiction. When asked how many people he calls on to help in the organization's mission, Brown picks up his phone, scrolls down his contact list, then gives up.

"I'd say about 500, give or take some. I don't know them all by name right now, but I've got their contacts . I can call any of them up for help if we need it," said Brown, who is 71.

Roger Wilcox's number gets pushed often. Wilcox, of Lapeer, heads up Wheelin 457's hunting program.

"He's the rock in the foundation," Wilcox said of Brown. "He never talks about slowing down."

Wilcox recalled the many years that Brown took the Wheelin message to the streets — or above

"The sports analogy seems appropriate for a Paralympic world record holder, state champion wheelchair basketball player and gold medalist marksman."

them, to be more accurate. Brown volunteered to be lifted in a crane high above M-24 to raise funds for the organization.

"They put him on the buck pole, and then people would pay money to get him down — or keep him up. He didn't care as long as we raised money," Wilcox said.

Brown added: "I said, 'How about you get me a bucket (to hold donations) and a rope and I'll stay up in the air until we raise $1,000?' Eventually we raised up to $12,000 and sold tickets for months beforehand for a raffle."

No time to mope

Brown's path didn't always stand out. He was raised in the Pentecostal Church, growing up in Pontiac and enlisting in the Marine Corps during the Vietnam era. After serving stateside, he used the GI Bill to earn an associate's degree in sociology and a bachelor's degree in human resource management.

Brown met his wife while both were working at Pontiac General Hospital.

"She came walking across the cafeteria, and I nudged my buddy

Ray Brown poses after a successful Canada goose hunt.

and said, 'That's the girl I am going to marry.' It was all over for me," he recalled.

Life was good. Ray and Marilyn had four healthy children, building a family that's been supplemented with eight grandchildren. They're planning to celebrate their golden wedding anniversary.

But the road got bumpy at the age of 43 when Ray's legs started weakening. He was diagnosed with muscular dystrophy caused by a genetic defect. There was no cure and the disease would progress, he was told.

Opening day of the 1993 firearms deer season beckoned.

"I'm laying there on Nov. 14, excited, but I've got a wheelchair beside my bed. I've got all the excitement of the opener. I thought one of my neighbors or somebody would pick me up to go deer hunting, but no one did. Then I started thinking, 'If this happened to me, it could happen to everyone,'" Brown said.

He didn't stay stationary for long, which has been a key to his staying healthy. Brown's philosophy is to take as few medications as possible — which has caused conflicts with doctors — and to keep moving. The strategy is working, as for the most part, his MD has not advanced.

Brown enlisted the support of North Branch American Legion Post 457, seeking to start a program for physically challenged veterans. Soon he led an airsoft marksman team whose string of national titles was gaining notoriety.

"From there, we started developing a program," Brown said.

Breaking barriers

A member of the Athletes with Disabilities Hall of Fame, Brown could put together an impressive trophy room. Ask him about representing the U.S. in the world wheelchair games hosted by Brazil, and his face lights up. He was one of seven athletes chosen to unfurl flags at the 100-foot Christ the Redeemer stature during the opening ceremony.

Brown would rather talk about the impact Wheelin 457 — the numbers came from the American Legion Post —on physically challenged people. One personal accomplishment, however, helps explain what's needed to unlock the mental doors that restrict some physically challenged people.

Brown is a big guy, which comes with a physical advantage in basketball whether a player is running or wheeling down the court. He was recruited to play on a talented wheelchair basketball team, but only reluctantly agreed to give it a try. "They put me in, but I didn't want to be there. A guy knocks me out of my wheelchair right away and opens a scrape on my wrist on hot asphalt in Flint. I came out, but after a while, I rolled up to the coach and said, 'Put me in the game.' He said, 'You didn't want to be in.' I grabbed him by the sleeve and said, 'Put me in."

People who have recently become handicapped may need a jolt to break through the barriers they face. That's where outdoor sports come in.

"They provide an opportunity for someone to become successful. It's tempting to say that I can't do this or I can't do that, to give yourself a label. But when we take them hunting and they kill a deer,

they think, 'Today I am a hunter.' We take them fishing and they catch fish, so they say, 'Today I am a fisherman,'" Brown said.

"They have success."

A growing reputation

The work of Wheelin 457, which evolved into its own nonprofit corporation, became infectious as more people learned of its mission.

"I'd say we're pushing having 5,000 acres available to us to hunt. We start in Oakland County and go up to Lapeer County, and we have property in Tuscola and Shiawassee counties, too, six counties in all," Brown said.

The organization has a platoon of experienced guides who are busy in the fall during Liberty and Independence hunts, which allow physically challenged hunters to shoot bucks or does. Limited baiting is allowed leading up to the Liberty Hunt.

"We have sight-ins prior to every hunt. We want to see the proficiency of the individual. If a guy is good at 30 yards, 50 yards or 100 yards, we want them to have an opportunity to harvest an animal at that distance. We want a clean harvest, that's our goal, not to have someone taking a 70-yard shot if they are proficient at 50 yards," Brown said.

In a typical year, the organization will help 50 deer hunters and another 15-18 hunters targeting turkeys. The organization also sponsors ice fishing tournaments and provides charter fishing opportunities.

Wheelin 457 holds a lottery each fall to provide a physically challenged veteran, police officer or firefighter with an opportunity to take a trophy buck donated by Green's Deer Ranch near Caro.

Often the first mission, though, is to provide the means for a physically challenged person to enjoy the outdoors.

"If you're in a wheelchair, your income is pretty low. If you're freshly injured, you're usually broke. That's where we step in. They say, 'I don't have a gun.' We say, 'Yes, you do." Or, 'I don't have shells.' We say, 'Yes, you do, and we'll buy your license.' Pretty soon, we have a productive member of society. We don't let people take advantage of us, but we don't go for excuses, either," Brown said.

Wheelin 457 recently opened a small office in the Deerfield Plaza, 5832 N. Lapeer Road, Suite E, North Branch. That provides a place to store equipment and meet privately with clients being served.

Volunteers, donations and referrals are always welcome. Like many organizations without a paid staff, Wheelin 457 operates on a budget that varies with the bottom line on its last bank account statement. Brown readily offers his cell phone number for inquiries. It's 989-225-9259.

"You say your prayers before you go to bed, and the next morning somebody calls and they say, 'Can I come down? I've got a donation.' I know we're not in charge of this; someone bigger is. We must be doing the right thing because so many doors open," Brown said.

Flag, coffee, Bible — all found on Ray Brown's desk and part of what keeps the Wheelin 457 organization moving forward.

The value of

By Robert Kennedy

Our exhalations rolled from our mouths into the frigid atmosphere of winter's cold morning. We stood gathered around our vehicles with steaming cups of coffee trying to warm our core while our shotguns leaned against the fence posts nearby. The snow underneath our feet was crisp and fresh from the single-digit temperatures that had been gifted to us overnight, and the sun's morning rays shining through the iridescent haze gave us hope in finding warmth throughout the day. In anticipation for the unequivocal memories that were about to unfold before us, we took pleasure in the beautiful first day of the year by making jokes with each other in between sips of our drinks and strategizing for the hunt that was to take place.

It may have been the first day of the new year, but, more importantly, it was the fourth annual small game hunt about to take place on the property. Through the years, the party size for the hunt has grown, and we are continually fortunate enough to bring different people along to experience the christening of the new year. This year was particularly unique because the camaraderie was shared among only family members.

We finished making plans to tackle the frigid hunting terrain, consumed the last of our drinks, loaded our guns and proceeded to the beginnings of the exploit. The expectations were high, but whether or not the predictions were met, we all knew the hunt would yield memories that would never be forgotten.

The crisp atmosphere burned our lungs as we marched through the entangled habitat as it leached the energy from our legs with each step. We spread out equally while communicating vocally as our boots kicked through snow-covered pockets of grass, brush

Camaraderie

and bramble. Pheasants erupted from their hidden defenses, rabbits darted along the snowy terrain in and out of cover, shotgun blasts rang through the silent atmosphere and an embrace was given to the successful shooters in the party.

The ambiance between all of us was encouraging. We would hoot and holler when someone had a successful shot, razz one another when coming up short and share the load of carrying the game in our bags and packs. The euphoria was experienced by all who were present. There was no competition between us, just an emboldening sense of fellowship that kept us pressing on through the day.

One could argue that there is a definitive difference between small game hunting and big game hunting solely based on the camaraderie aspect that it perpetuates. Even though many big game hunters come together annually and congratulate each other, oftentimes, there is a sense of contempt that one feels within the inner workings of the communities. Phrases similar to "should've given it another year" or "what did it score" are narratives never mentioned among small game hunters. Even though these phrases may be spoken out of friendship or teaching, they can tend to strip away fellowship and create resentment in the hearts of new hunters.

In gist, small game hunting is a cornerstone of our hunting heritage. Pursuing squirrels and other small game is generally one of the first encounters many new hunters have of the heritage. When trying to introduce potential new hunters to the joys of the sport, often pursuing larger game can pose hurdles in encouraging interest. Large game hunting is usually accompanied by early mornings, extra weather considerations, whispering conversations and more money spent when purchasing equipment. On the other hand, when in the pursuit of small game,

things are relaxed, conversations can be carefree, equipment to get started is minimal and you can wake up late with success still certain.

During our annual hunt, the stresses of the world could be witnessed falling off of one another's shoulders. Conversations were loud and boisterous, and the old shotguns we used were as accurate as the day they were manufactured. We were feeling slightly fatigued as we had no bird or rabbit dog, but that is an affair we took pride in. It may have been more laborious for us to flush game, but we weren't limited in opportunity due to excellent population numbers and the continuous habitat improvements that took place on the property.

Reaching our halfway point in the hunt yielded the group 15 rabbits and two rooster pheasants, with many missed opportunities in the mix. As we double-checked our count, we laughed with each other about missed chances as new hunters in the group expressed amazement about the opportunities that were present. We basked in the success thus far while still keeping focus on the march ahead of us. With eight of us present, we knew we had quite a way to go before we reached our limits, but our cups were already overflowing with success.

After a brief snack of some homemade jerky and a drink of water, we continued to press on. My grandfather walked in the mechanically mowed paths as the younger ones in the group trudged through the grass habitat, attempting to push rabbits and flush more pheasants his way. The morning's haze had now lifted due to the sun climbing its way into the sky. Field mice and voles scampered around our feet as we made our way through the underbrush and male cardinals perched on poplar branches watched us as we passed by them. The aura projected from my grandfather was full of delight as he witnessed his family enjoying the shared successes.

Years prior to our annual hunt, when I was a young boy, my grandfather was able to lead me on my first successful squirrel hunt. We sat on the forest floor underneath an old white oak that still clung to its leaves from where they had grown earlier that spring. The dead foliage that had found its way to the forest floor was dry and curled from the afternoon sun, which allowed us to hear the bushy-tailed critters bounding in all directions. With an old single-shot .410 in hand, I had scared off quite a few opportunities earlier in the day until a large fox squirrel made the mistake of thinking I was a harmless tween. I can clearly relive the embrace my grandfather shared with me in my recollections after the successful shot. Nearly 20 years later, I was able to share that same joy again with him as he and I both made successful shots on cottontails and pheasants.

"During our annual hunt, the stresses of the world could be witnessed falling off of one another's shoulders."

Even though it was only my first squirrel, I was able to grasp the satisfaction of small game hunting. Those enjoyments are what we're able to provoke dedication to time spent in the woods with friends and family members. Before ever committing an annual date to a large group hunt, my cousin Jesse and I started setting aside time specifically to chase squirrels in the hardwoods of mid-Michigan. During our time as teenagers, we embraced the advantages of small game hunting. Conversations were unhindered by whispers, ammunition was cheap and the memories made were priceless. Even now, in

Pheasants and cottontails were harvested during an annual hunt the author, his friends and family hold. While the harvest is part of the experience, the hunt is more about the camaraderie shared.

our adult lives, we value the time spent together chasing small game.

In a conversation with Jesse about small game hunting, he shared: "A lot of times we get caught up in the routine and complexities of big game hunting and sometimes forget to enjoy it. Small game hunting takes it back to the basics. It's the hunts that you recall from your youth and where you remember first discovering the pure enjoyment of hunting."

Not only are our youthful remembrances imprinted on us, but we continue to write our stories as we set forth on each future hunting narrative. Unintentionally, the dedication to small game hunting from Jesse and I grew attention from our other friends and family members. The recognition of our escapades and enthusiasm prompted the annual outings on the first of every new year. Eagerly we gave invitations to those that were interested, and a new tradition was born in the name of camaraderie.

After a half day, many spent shells and sore shoulders, the fourth annual small game hunt produced 32 rabbits and five rooster pheasants within our group. We didn't reach our limit, but our earlier predictions of success were met. Captivating flashes of delight were inscribed in memory. Treasured time spent together between family members was etched into our hearts, and the sense of exhilaration surrounded that day.

Shared responsibilities of cleaning the game took place after the hunt with more laughter and teaching moments observed. With each animal meticulously dressed and prepared for packaging and eating, small bits of rabbit fur and feathers scattered throughout were the only visual cues remaining from the prior labors. The most eventful annual hunt to date had come to an end, but the remembrances of the day's activities were everlasting.

The bonding that happens between individuals during hunting escapades often goes underrated when considering all the benefits hunting has to offer. Youthful memories and experiences with those around us directly influence us as we grow older with the passing of seasons. Our memories are painted with moments in time that rarely highlight the killing of the animal but rather the details surrounding the pinnacle moment. The people surrounding us, the frost on the grass tips, the sun's rays on our cheeks, and the melodies of songbirds that reach our ears formulates the images found in our dreams. These moments witnessed are not hoarded in our minds alone but are shared between souls to capture the euphoric essence of the hunt fully. Creating these memories while involving other individuals can become a collaborative masterpiece of art that is imprinted for a lifetime on our character.

Salmon Funnels

Tips and tricks for coho salmon

By Jim Bedford

Salmon numbers are down and many slow days for them have already been reported as I write this in early July. There has been some success for chinook when a concentration is found, but as usual, coho or silver salmon seem to get lost every summer. They provide a fantastic nearshore fishery in the spring in southern Lake Michigan but become very scattered throughout the lake in the summer. Rarely do trollers target these fish, but they do show up occasionally in the catch. We are going to concentrate on the cohos in this article, and these lost salmon suddenly show up as we move into September and they hone in on their planted or natal streams. They become concentrated in the bays, drowned river mouth lakes and harbors of the rivers and soon move upstream. Peak numbers are found in the tributaries in October, and some spawning will continue into November and December.

Chinook salmon are stronger and larger than cohos, but the smaller salmon put up a splashy battle. The silver salmon are also less moody than their bigger cousin and eagerly attack flashy lures on their river migration. A special attribute of the cohos is that they remain in good shape for a considerable time after they enter the river and are able to move upstream to their spawning grounds quickly. For example, in the Grand River, they can navigate through five fish ladders, swim over 140 river miles, and still be silver and shiny when they arrive in Lansing.

Most of our coho salmon are now planted in Lake Michigan tributaries, but runs of wild fish continue in some Lake Huron streams and in many rivers that feed Lake Superior. These fish spend over a year in the river, so they must find a cold stream to be successful in procreating. This doesn't eliminate all warm water rivers because many of them have cool creeks flowing into them and cohos prefer to spawn in small streams.

Even though cohos might show up anywhere, we are going to concentrate on the Lake Michigan tributaries that receive large plants of these fish. Most coho salmon spend just a year and a half in the big lake, and thus it will be the 2020 plant returning this fall. A small percentage will run as jacks having spent just one summer in the lake, and an even smaller number will stay out an extra year and become trophy-sized. Since these fish put on almost all of their weight in their second summer in the lake, the size of this year's salmon will depend on the food supply and the growing conditions of this past summer.

The Platte River gets the largest plant of coho salmon because the Platte River Hatchery is where eggs are taken for future plants. Fish stage in Platte Bay before they move into the river. Anglers with small boats can fish here when the winds are light or are coming from the south or east. Platte and Loon lakes are natural lakes in the lower Platte and also offer the boat angler a last chance to hook up to feisty coho salmon.

There is a harvest weir a short distance upstream from Lake Michigan, and the river for 300 feet below the weir is closed to fishing whenever the weir is in operation. A percentage of the run is passed through the lower weir providing fishing to the Platte River hatchery east of Honor. But, again, you cannot fish within 300 feet of this weir. The clear water of the Platte allows you to sight fish for cohos whether they are in the holes or spawning in the upper river. This clarity also dictates a stealthy approach on your part. Check for special regulations on this river in your Michigan Fishing Guide.

A consistent run of coho also occurs in the nearby Betsie River. This river has never been planted with coho, but there is likely some straying from the Platte as well as good natural reproduction in this river. The best fishing in October for cohos is found between US-31 and the Homestead lamprey barrier and in the upper river.

"Most of our coho salmon are now planted in Lake Michigan tributaries, but runs of wild fish continue in some Lake Huron streams and in many rivers that feed Lake Superior."

The Big Manistee receives a modest plant of cohos and also benefits from natural reproduction in its tributary, Bear Creek.

Bear Creek was one of the first streams to receive coho smolts back in 1966 and has not been planted since. Wild coho continue to be produced by this stream and trying to intercept them in the Big Manistee below Bear Creek is a good plan. Once the huge wild chinook run winds down in Bear Creek, you can also have good coho action in this tributary. You will find good numbers of cohos in the mile of gravel below Tippy Dam in October.

Bringing the fish to the people was the goal when they built six ladders on the dams below Lansing on the Grand River. The ladder at Lyons is no longer in use since the dam was removed. Our longest river receives the second largest

plant of coho salmon, and these fish have been the most successful at negotiating all these obstacles. This has resulted in a good fishery for cohos in the Capital City each October. Each dam on the way temporarily concentrates these fish, but they find their way upstream faster than the chinook and steelhead. In addition to trying below the 6th Street, Webber, Portland, Grand Ledge, and North Lansing dams, check out the areas below feeder creeks. Fishable numbers of silver salmon move into the Red Cedar River and Sycamore Creek after they reach Lansing.

Good numbers of coho salmon add to the mixed-bag fishery in the St. Joseph River each October. Many of these fish are heading for Indiana, but like in the Grand, they will temporarily concentrate below each dam. The best fishing is found below the dam in Berrien Springs, and a half dozen cold creeks also attract the cohos in the lower river. Most of these streams are designated trout streams, but you can find coho in the St. Joseph River off the mouths of streams like Pipestone, Hickory and Farmer's creeks.

The Boardman River gets a plant of coho salmon to provide a fishery in both Grand Traverse Bay and in downtown Traverse City. Just south of the St. Joseph River, the Galien River receives a small plant of coho salmon. Fishable numbers of wild cohos also run many unplanted rivers each year. Contact the Fisheries Management Unit for the area that the river or rivers you want to fish are located, and they will give you an update on the status of the run. Their phone numbers are found in the Michigan Fishing Guide you get with your license.

Like chinook and other Pacific salmon, coho stop feeding when they enter the tributary streams. Even though their digestive tract is atrophying, these salmon still eagerly pick up eggs, especially when they are fresh run. After they have been in the river for a while, you will have better luck with shiny lures. Even though these fish have no appetite, it is possible to trigger a reflex feeding action from the salmon remembering when they fed on silvery smelt and alewives in the big lake. You are also invading their territory with flashy lures, which aggravate or excite them into striking.

Spinners, spoons and plugs are all excellent river lures for cohos. They get the attention of the salmon both visibly and sonically. If you prefer to drift your offering, try those lures that wobble or spin rather than drift baits that have no action.

Whatever type of lure you choose, pick models with highly polished metallic finishes coupled with fluorescent colors. The fluorescent red, pink, and orange seem to be preferred by coho salmon on their spawning run. On dark days or when the river is stained, choose lures with genuine silver plating to take advantage of this finish's superior light-reflecting quality.

Silver salmon like to rest in

the deeper runs and holes of the rivers on their spawning migration. They prefer slower moving water than steelhead, and you will often find schools in big, slow holes. The resting cohos will often also use overhead cover such as sweepers and log jams.

Even though coho salmon will travel a long way to grab your lure, make your presentations near the bottom and close to cover. The most effective cast is across or quartering downstream and then sweeping the lure across the current. Let your spinner or spoon sink a bit before beginning the sweep to help keep it down.

Since the current will pull against your line and keep the lure spinning or wobbling, only a small amount of line must be retrieved during the sweep. Be ready to set the hook anytime but be especially alert when the lure swings just below you. Spoons and spinners will begin to rise at the end of the sweep, but you can continue to hold plugs in the current or slowly back them straight downstream.

Coho salmon have a habit of frequently taking a lure very gently. They will come up behind it and inhale it with no perceptible pulling on the line. For this reason, a sensitive graphite rod is a must, and it is very important to develop a feel for your lure when it is spinning or wobbling normally. Anytime there is a change, set the hook. In addition, in clear water, it will pay off in more hookups if you can follow the path of your lure with your eyes. It is exhilarating to watch a big coho make your lure disappear.

"Spinners, spoons and plugs are all excellent river lures for cohos. They get the attention of the salmon both visibly and sonically."

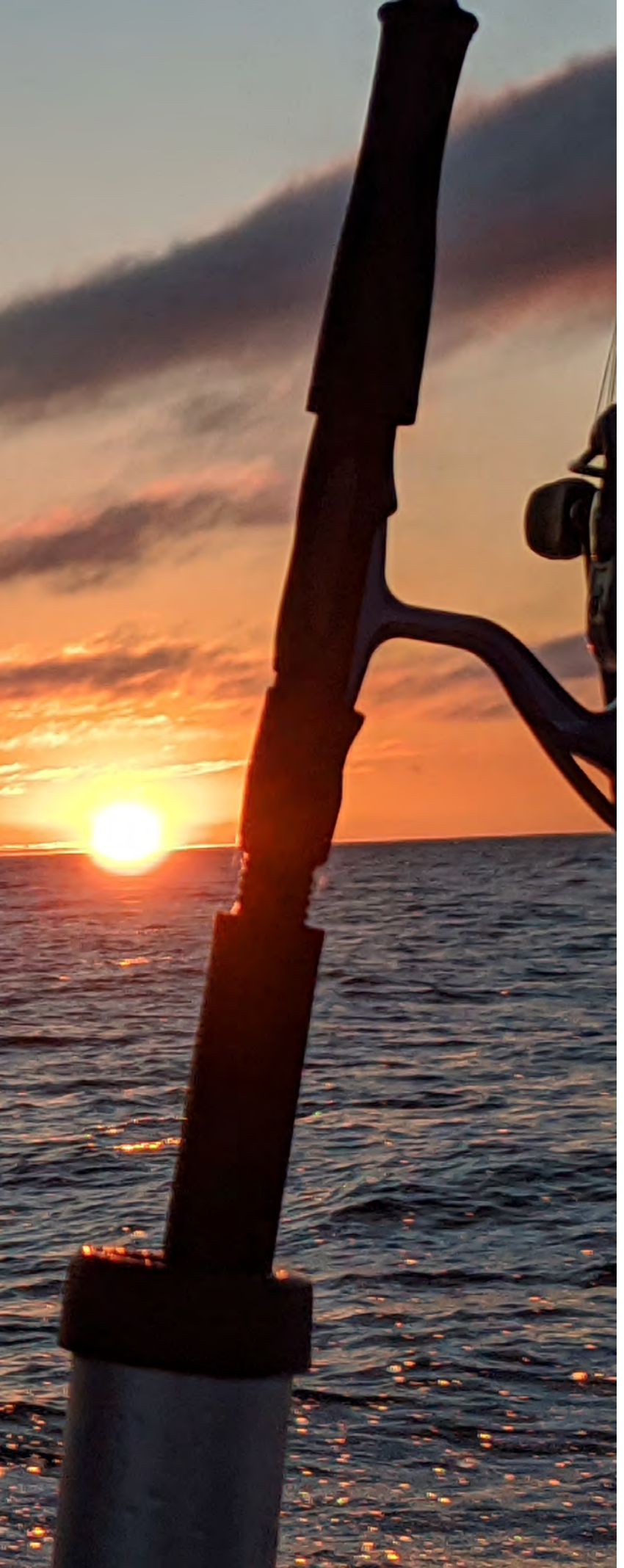
Spawning coho are also fun to tease into striking. These fish are probably the easiest of any of our anadromous salmonids to catch when they are on the redds. They provide outstanding sport for the fly angler using conventional fly tackle because their redds are usually in relatively shallow water. Large marabou streamers in leech and spey patterns will likely irritate the salmon into striking. Using flies that you can see will also help you determine how the salmon react when they pass. Then you can change based on whether the salmon show no interest or are spooked by the fly or follow and don't hit, etc. Following the fly with your eyes will also help you prevent the accidental foul hooking of the fish.

The same tackle you use for steelhead will be just right for coho salmon. These fish don't seem to be line shy, so you can use heavy enough line to keep the salmon out of the brush and pull your terminal tackle off the snags. Since coho have sharp gill covers and often roll and wrap themselves up in the line, it pays to use an abrasion-resistant line. Even with tough lines, don't put a lot of pressure on the salmon when they are wrapped up or cut free. Instead, slack off a bit and try to get below the fish and let the current help you ease the fish into the net.

Remember that coho like to spawn in small streams. So keep moving upstream as the run progresses and always fish the holes just below small tributaries with extra care.

Fishing the Rock

By Arthur Jalkanen



Longfellow, in his epic Song of Hiawatha, waxes poetically of Lake Gitche Gumee. It is loosely translated from the Ojibwe, meaning huge water. Lake Superior is the largest freshwater lake in the world in total area. About 50 miles offshore, far from Marquette in Michigan's Upper Peninsula, sits the loneliest place in the world — the Stannard Rock Lighthouse.

In 1835, Captain Charles Stannard first discovered the reef that extends for a quarter-mile with depths as shallow as four feet and averaging 15 feet. With the opening of the Soo Locks in 1855 and the increased maritime traffic, a lighthouse was needed. Construction started in 1877, and the first light was shone in 1882. At the time, its construction was rated as one of the top ten engineering feats in the United States. The lighthouse keepers worked on a two-weeks-on, two-weeks-off schedule and first operated the light with flammable materials. In early 1961, an explosion of fuel resulted in the killing of one of the lighthouse keepers and three others being badly injured and stranded for many days until rescue by a passing ship. Ultimately in 1962, the light became automated. By that time, word of the excellent fishing available on the reef had begun to spread.

Lake trout (salvelinus namaycush) are one of the most popular game fish in North America. Lake Superior is a target-rich environment for anglers. Stannard Rock is the 10-X spot on that target. The reef provides an ideal ecosystem for lakers breeding and feeding. Most lake trout fishing in Lake Superior involves trolling lines over miles of open water. At the Rock, you actually hold the rod and you control the presentation to your quarry.

The current Michigan record for lake trout was caught there in 1997, weighing 61.5 pounds and caught by drift fishing.

My best friend of 40 years, Bill Sweet, and I wanted to partake in this adventure. He and I have fished together over the years from the Florida Keys to the fly-in outposts of Northern Ontario. The summer of 2020 found our annual fly-in for northern pike canceled due to the shutdown of the Canadian border due to Covid. A perfect opening for our much-talked-about trip to the Rock was presented. Our intelligence gathering revealed that approximately 40 percent of all scheduled trips to the Rock had to be canceled due to high winds and waves. Steady blows over 20 knots are fairly common and make a trip out to the Rock for fishing unattainable.

Because of the weather odds, we booked three days of fishing with Hooked-Up Charters out of Marquette for the first week of August.

The drive from metro Detroit took up the first day, but upon crossing the Mackinac Bridge our mindset changed. The Upper Peninsula of Michigan is a whole different state. The t-shirt we saw, "Social distancing since 1837," says it all — mile after mile of open road through scenic forests and big skies.

I was born in the Upper Peninsula and lived in Marquette for a short period while my mother and father lived in married housing at Northern Michigan University. My first actual fishing memory is sitting with my father on one of the piers in Marquette's harbor with our bobbers being watched carefully. This memory returned many decades later with my fishing experiences coming full-circle.

Approximately 100 miles out of Marquette, our captain called us en route. He told us fishing was off for the following day due to high winds and, of course, the big rollers. He told us the weather looked better for Saturday, the following day, and he would be in touch with us. Our decision to book three trips and get the odds in our favor for a trip out had been rewarded.

About 20 miles out of Marquette on M-28, we passed a sign for Kimar's Resort and Charters. Not wanting to be landlocked the whole next day, we turned around and pulled in for a look-see. As it turned out, Kimar's was located on the shore of Lake Superior in what is called Shelter Bay. A view of the map shows how this moniker came to be. We were told that they could take us out the next day, so we booked one of their inshore charters.

"Our intelligence gathering revealed that approximately 40 percent of all scheduled trips to the Rock had to be canceled due to high winds and waves. Steady blows over 20 knots are fairly common and make a trip out to the Rock for fishing unattainable."

The next morning we arrived and were met by our Captain, Ric O'Neill, who was the son-in-law of the owner, Dave Kimar. He greeted us and we boarded his 24-foot Hewes. It was equipped with a 250-horsepower Tohatsu outboard and a 25-horsepower kicker. The plan was to use pump rods and troll our spoons through the deep trough just outside Shelter Bay. The captain put added weight on our lines, and the troll was on. About 25-knot winds and four-foot waves made for some tough sledding, though.

Because of the wind and the waves, Captain Rick could not keep our lines in the zone. The rain then came and the other boats that were out headed for shore.

Captain Rick's other job is as a sergeant at a local state prison. Suffice to say, he's a tough guy. He wanted to know if we wanted to head in. Having been at it for only a couple of hours, Bill and I were not done yet.

The captain added some more weight to our lines, and the pursuit of lakers continued. At about lunchtime and still with no fish, our toughness was fading.

Despite top-notch rain gear, we were still getting wet. Our Sperry Topsiders were soaked through, and we were getting cold. The possibility of eating our lunch was quickly dismissed as we bounced off of the onslaught of wave after wave. The captain saw it in our eyes and graciously gave us an out saying, "looks like it's not going to happen today, fellas. You gave it a hell of a try. What do you say we head in?" With feigned disappointment, we acquiesced.

Pulling into the dock, we were met by Dave Kimar, the third-generation owner of the lodge. He retired from the chartering of guests but is still active in the management of the resort. Dave told us we were the last boat off the water, so our egos were intact. No fish were caught, but we took what the big lake threw at us. We lived to fight another day. We told Dave we were going to the Rock the next day. He boasted that his boats had been going there since 1963. He recalled that before modern electronics even finding the Rock was problematic. If fog rolled in, the Rock would disappear, and his charters could search in vain

Bill Sweet, left, and Arthur Jalkanen pose in front of the Stannard Rock Lighthouse.

Captain Pat Magdaleno poses with a lake trout that angler Bill Sweet brought to the net. The fish's projected weight was 40 pounds using girth and length measurements the captain took.

on many occasions before simply heading back in. Having earned our sea legs, we were ready for the trip.

Checking our phones at windfinder.com, the weather at the Rock the next day called for five- to 10-knot winds. The temperature was going to be in the 50s and partly cloudy. We spoke with our captain that evening, and our trip was a go.

We met Captain Pat Magdaleno at 4:30 in the morning at the City Marina of Marquette. His vessel is a 28-foot Grady White with twin 225 Yamahas. It was dark, quiet and calm in the marina when Captain Pat greeted us enthusiastically, inquiring if we were ready to go. "You betcha," using the vernacular of the UP, we replied. We loaded our gear and grub and we were off. Once we cleared the marina and the no-wake zone, we were up on plane. The land lights quickly faded away, and we were engulfed by the darkness and bright stars still shining above. I shivered as a chill went through me either because of the cool of the morning or the excitement and anticipation of the moment. Sitting in the aft seats, Bill and I tried to talk over the drone of the 225s. The general messages conveyed were, "well, here we are, we made it, let's do this right."

As false dawn came on us, we kept peaking over the bow looking for the lighthouse. "10 minutes," the captain shouted back to us. Shortly thereafter, the engines were cut and the captain pointed east. There it was, the loneliest outpost on earth. The sun was just coming over the horizon, and we had arrived at our hunting grounds. Captain Pat quickly set up our rods. We were using seven-foot carbon fiber Mags with extended cork handles. The captain has quite a successful business making these rods in a variety of sizes and applications. (magscustomrods.com). Our rods were lined with 20-pound braid and a four-foot, 20-pound mono leader. Two of the rods were set up with three-ounce jig heads with a skirt and 5/0 hooks. These were then tipped with a chunk of whitefish belly. The other two rods were set up with Moonshine lures with a single hook. The reels on all four rods were modestly priced Pflueger Presidentials. The captain told us he goes through dozens of these reels every year.

Our vessel had the best electronics I had ever seen on a fishing boat. The screen of his fish finder was huge with a super sharp image. We began marking fish at 100 feet and the pursuit was on.

With the sun just clearing the

eastern horizon, we dropped our lines and the captain worked the rods with the lures. There was no delay of piscatorial pursuit, and within minutes, I had action. I quickly began reeling in, and just like that, the fish was off. The captain told me, once again, "you really gotta set that hook."

The next time I remembered, and the fight was on.

A minute into my battle, Bill had a customer, too. A doubleheader right out of the chute. About 10 minutes later, after the captain's successful net job, Bill and I had two nice lakers in the boat. Being catch and release guys, we got them back into the water after a quick photo. We hoped the great start was a precursor of a good day on the water.

Fishing that morning was perfect. We would fish a spot until it slowed down and then the captain would put us on another productive site. There was enough time between bites to talk and savor the companionship enjoyed by two longtime friends. There were no long silences because the fish just kept on cooperating with the captain's expertise at locating them.

We took a quick lunch break of Italian subs bought the night before from Jean Kay's in Marquette. Great tasting sandwiches with a nice cold one from the Yeti cooler was a perfect break. The captain explained to us how his family came to the UP many years earlier from California. His father had secured a government contract to do all of the flooring at an airbase near Marquette. It was a two-year job and the family moved with him from California. The job was completed and his family liked the area so much they stayed and became Yoopers. The captain, a teenager at the time, had tried other career paths after high school.

These included a stint as a professional MMA fighter. Ultimately, the independence and freedom of fishing on the big lake and the support of a beautiful fiancé steered him to his role as a charter boat owner/operator. We toasted his continued success and the good woman backing him up.

We were hoping the usually quieter afternoon session was going to be more of the morning action, and we were not disappointed.

Right off, Bill hooked up with a nice 10-pounder. The captain had him hold it in the water at about 20 feet down. The Lake Superior water is so clear we had viability to about 75 feet. The hooked fish brought up curious onlookers from below. The captain explained that the fish from below come up to investigate, and other lines are then thrown at them. This type of fishing is exactly like Mahi-Mahi fishing in the Florida Keys.

This time, though, they hit the baits but did not take them. Bill brought the laker to the net but unfortunately, it was not revivable.

Sometimes when a fish is brought up from the

deep, they do not expel their air bladder, and they cannot survive. "A good one for the smoker," said the captain as he sliced near the pectoral fin to bleed the fish out and put him on ice.

As we were nearing the end of our fishing day, Bill hooked what seemed to be a good one on the lure. His Mags rod was bent nearly in half. When the beast showed itself at about 40 feet, the captain became quite animated. He began coaxing and cajoling Bill with instructions and support. The laker was not close to defeat and decided to head down again while the reel screamed its release of line. After another 10 minutes of lift, lower and reel, reel, reel, we saw the fish again. It was expelling its air bubbles as it came up. Bill almost got him to netting range once again when it set off for the deep dark water below. Bill continued fighting him again and slowly began regaining line and the upper hand. The captain extended the 10-foot net handle and the contest was over.

The captain brought the fish to boat side and let him rest to regain strength (the fish, not Bill). He had us hold the net to the side while he measured the length and girth of the fish with fishing line he then bit off with the two measurements.

He put the two pieces of line into his pocket, and we were able to get the fish into the boat for a quick picture.
The fish was simply too big for Bill to hold standing up, so he had to remain seated while the pictorial bragging evidence was secured. The captain then put the huge laker into the water and held him for approximately 15 minutes before he flashed back to the deep. Whoops of joys and high fives followed. A great fish, a great fight and a successful release. Perfect!

The captain then measured his two pieces of fishing line and entered the calculations into his phone. He estimated that the fish weighed 40 pounds. He told us that was the biggest fish caught that year by all of his clients. He congratulated Bill on a job well done.

The author poses with Bill Sweet, right, after landing a double near Stannard Rock Lighthouse.

Before heading back to port, we pulled up to the lighthouse. We cast a couple of dozen times with the lures in 10 feet of water, but there were no takers. The captain told us that the fish will be in the shallow water earlier in the season, but in August, they generally head to the deeper honey holes. All-in-all, it was a great day at the Rock. A couple of dozen lakers were brought to the net. We stowed the gear and headed in. A two-hour boat ride back to the harbor with a feeling of mission accomplished.

That night we had dinner at a makeshift dining area in the parking lot of the Landmark Hotel where we were staying. The restrictions were such that the Landmark had not opened to full functioning. A nice glass of red wine with our steaks and a white Russian for dessert capped off a perfect day.

Checking the forecast for the following day on windfinder.com, it showed that 37-mile-per-hour winds were predicted. Thankfully, we had our day under the belt. That night as I lay in bed, I could see the large cross on the steeple of the First Presbyterian Church from my hotel window. I thanked the Lord for the ability and the opportunity to go fishing with my friend at such a fantastic venue. I thought of myself as a small boy with his dad decades earlier and the circumstantial chain of events that connected me and my best buddy fishing those same waters now. I thanked the Lord again for his blessings.

Fishing Stannard Rock does consume a lot of time. But as Thomas McGuane so aptly said, "that's the whole point of fishing." Better yet, as Thoreau said, "men go fishing all their lives without knowing it is not the fish they are after."

Escaping from the grind of our workday lives, the conviviality of time spent with a lifelong friend, and ultimately, the satisfaction that thrills through your veins with an adventure done right — that's why we fish!

Second Century of Service

Saginaw Field & Stream finishes new range, showcases it to public

By Patrick Craig

Saginaw Field and Stream was founded Saturday, September 2, 1916 as Saginaw Forest & Stream Club. The club was reorganized to Saginaw Field & Stream Club in 1923 to meet the evolving needs of our members, and the club became a charter member of Michigan United Conservation Clubs in 1937. In 1955, we began searching for a place to establish roots and call home. We were fortunate enough to find our little piece of up north at the Crawford's property located at 1296 N. Gleaner Road in Saginaw. The purchase was finalized in 1956, and we have been working tirelessly since to enhance our offerings to our members.

Our mission is to promote conservation and sportsmanship among sportspersons and the general public through example and instruction; conserve and responsibly harvest our wildlife and natural resources; guard our land and waters against pollution and invasive species; cooperate with federal, state and local authorities in the propagation and conservation of fish and game; promote safe participation in the shooting sports.

As shooting techniques, interests and sports have evolved, we needed to enhance our ranges to accommodate the changes safely.

When we purchased our property, it was rural and surrounded by agriculture. That has changed significantly over the years as the surrounding area has become more populated by homes and industry. With the announcement of the Great Lakes Tech Park, our world changed.

When Fullerton West (the building at the top of the picture with a white roof) opened its doors in 2015, the board knew that we needed to act quickly to circumvent potential issues that could adversely affect our club. Some members did not feel the same, arguing that the club has never kowtowed to neighbors. They thought we should simply take a firm approach with the Great Lakes Tech Park businesses — essentially the last-man-standing approach. The board believed that attitude to be shortsighted since the club could wind up in a legal battle costing tens of thousands of dollars spent in defense of a preventable situation.

For years, the club discussed ways to improve the safety of our ranges and increase shooting opportunities for our members. The aforementioned situation provided the impetus to take action on the incessant debate. The Future

Projects Committee led by Mark Fanning got to work developing a plan to address our encroachment concerns and improvement desires. The F.I.R.E.A.R.M.S. plan submitted to the board was overwhelmingly approved and subsequently presented to the membership for final approval. The project's acronym stands for:

Flexibility - Ranges no longer shutdown to accommodate the majority of events
Improvements - Fewer restrictions necessary without jeopardizing safety
Remove Windows - Enough said
Environment - Remove invasive species, stimulate native species, address aging tree population
Access - Address underlying issue impacting roads; make ranges more accessible to disabled
Range distances - Additional opportunities to improve marksmanship
Modernization - Establish the groundwork to technologically improve the ranges
Safety - Proactive measures to minimize rounds leaving our property and address encroachment

As with any significant undertaking, the project was met with spirited debate. Ultimately, the majority of members voted to secure our ability to continue our conservation mission for our second century of service.

While many believed the most significant challenges were behind us with the plan's adoption, we quickly found out the fun was only beginning. Mark and his team worked with shooting range designers from around the country, sought Thomas Township approval, coordinated contractors, and oversaw the project's progress in conjunction with our project manager Spicer Group. While there are many people that deserve recognition for this project, we would be remised if we did not acknowledge our members for approving the plan and our sponsors for helping to fund it.

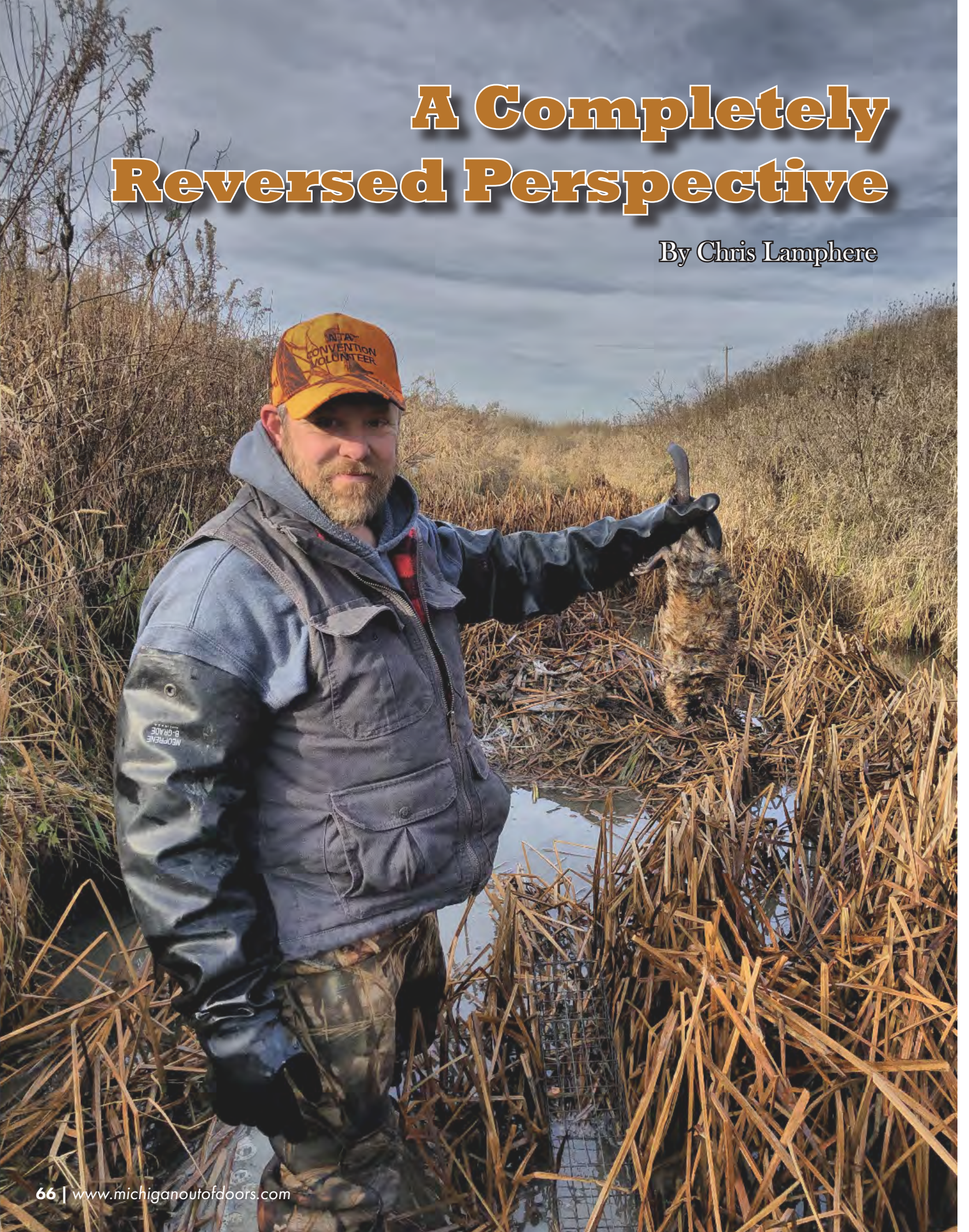
Left top: Fullerton West (the building with the white roof) opened its doors in 2015 and caused the club's leadership to think proactively about safety and future issues. Above: The new range looking north.

The onset of the COVID Pandemic slowed down the timeline, but we are pleased to announce that our dream is now a reality. We are extremely pleased with the results, and we would be more than thrilled to give a tour of our new facility. Please visit us during our business hours on Tuesday or Saturday.

Saginaw Field & Stream has been a member of Michigan United Conservation Clubs since its founding in 1937.

A Completely Reversed Perspective

By Chris Lamphere



Inclusive culture, growth of predator calling credited for bolstering furbearer hunting and trapping rates

In the olden days, trappers were a secretive lot who kept the tricks of their trade extremely close to the vest, reluctant to share even the most rudimentary information about the centuries-old practice.

Today, trappers and hunters of fur-bearing animals openly discuss techniques and swap secrets through YouTube videos, online chat forums, and during state and national conventions.

Mark Earl, public relations director for the Michigan Trappers and Predator Callers Association, said trappers and — more recently — predator callers have collectively realized that to keep their traditions alive for generations to come, they have to be willing to share their hard-earned knowledge and be open to outsiders.

"We all realized we needed young people to be interested if it's going to continue," Earl said. "People that trapped used to take the skills and information they had to the grave. That has changed a lot, and a lot of that change is because of the internet."

That nascent willingness to welcome outsiders into the fold may very well have had a beneficial effect on the number of people trapping and hunting fur-bearing animals such as beaver, racoons, coyotes, skunks, bobcats, muskrats and marten.

Participation rates in almost all forms of hunting have taken a hit in the last couple of decades, but hunting and trapping of furbearers saw something of a resurgence of interest over the last 20-30 years.

According to data collected by the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), while fur harvesting activities have declined gradually since 2013, current estimates are well above the lowest estimates reported during the mid-1990s.

Adam Bump, DNR furbearer and upland game bird specialist, said more licenses were sold in 2013 than at any point during the 1980s, which generally is considered the "heyday" of such activities in Michigan.

Bump said it's a bit of a mystery why trapping and hunting for fur-bearing animals didn't decline at the same pace as other activities, notably small-game and deer hunting, which have seen steady and unrelenting declines in participation since the late 1990s (except for 2020).

One possible explanation for the difference is the recent cultural shift within the trapping and furbearer hunting community.

"There was a secretive element to it," Bump said. "Trappers tended to be more reserved. It's now a completely reversed perspective."

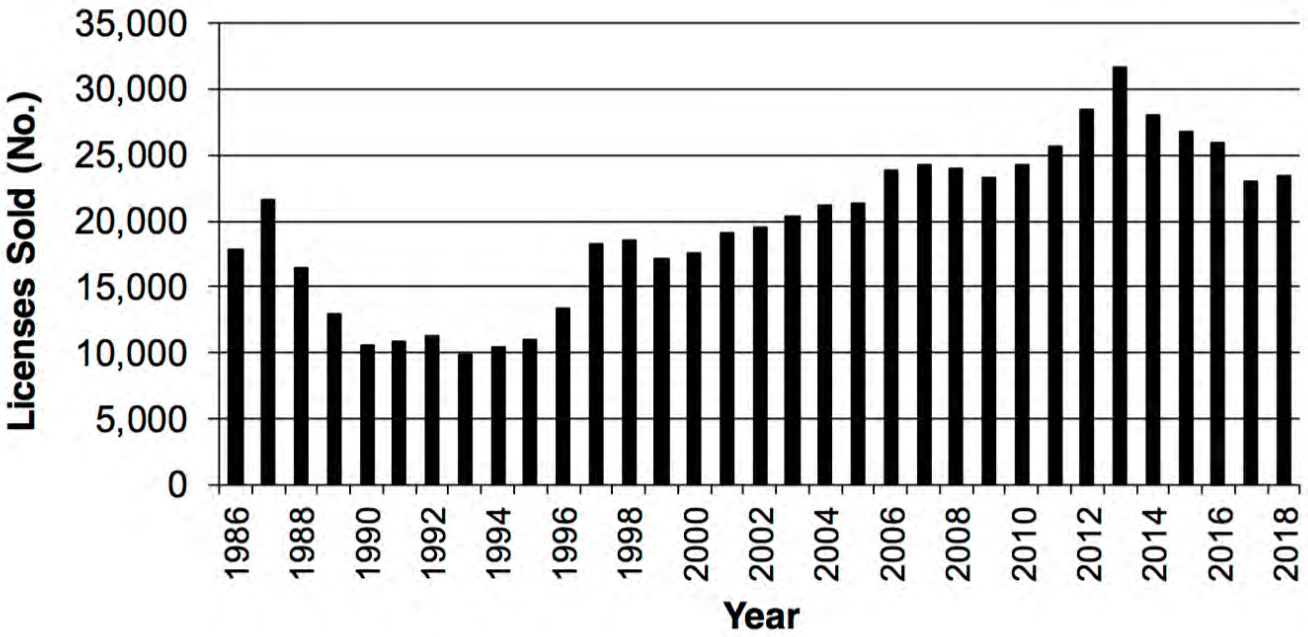
The difference might also be explained by the growth of a particular type of hunting practice involving fur-bearing predators.

In 2009, the Michigan Trappers Association added predator callers to its name in recognition of the increasing popularity of the activity.

Predator calling revolves primarily around bobcats, coyotes, foxes and, to a lesser extent, raccoons. It can be done at night using lights or night-vision goggles.

"It's an exciting sport," Earl

Furharvester Licenses Sold by Year



said. "You see people doing it on TV a lot nowadays."

"Predator callers are starting to take up a larger percentage of furbearer hunters," Bump said. "It might be because it's pretty affordable and easy to get into."

To get an idea of how much predator calling has increased in popularity over the years (and because the survey included specific questions about the practice), Bump points to bobcat survey data from 2010 and 2018, which is the most recent data available (due to COVID, there is no survey data for 2019).

In 2010, 18% of bobcats registered in the state were harvested by hunters using calls, while 26% were harvested by hunters using dogs. By 2018, those percentages had switched places: 29% of registered bobcats were taken by hunters using calls and 14% by hunters using dogs.

Bump said increased interest in predator calling likely contributed to 2018 being the second biggest year for bobcat hunting in the last 35 years, second only to 2003 in terms of the total number of hunters participating.

Pelt prices might also play into that equation, but Bump said the peak market for furs was decades ago. While extremes on both ends might still influence hunting activity to a degree, the price for bobcat pelts currently falls somewhere in the middle.

The increase in predator calling interest is something worth looking into as a potential avenue through which more young people could be introduced to other forms of hunting and trapping, said Bump, who believes that changes in game laws allowing hunting to be done at night, in addition to the former Michigan Trappers Association changing their name to the Michigan Trappers and Predator Callers Association, are both signs that predator calling is already becoming recognized as a potential source of growth for the conservation industry.

For Mark Earl, growing interest in a new type of furbearer hunting method also is great news for the age-old art of trapping, which still occasionally gets some bad press due to misconceptions about the ethics of the activity.

"A big part of what we do is correct those misconceptions," said Earl, who added that trapping is a very effective and humane harvest method, especially for nuisance species that are difficult to hunt using other techniques.

"There are more muskrats caught in Michigan than anything else," Earl said. "Most everything that is trapped is a nuisance species."

Drain commissioners love trappers, Earl said, because they remove beavers that are causing havoc to waterways with their dams. In addition, many deer hunters become trappers or partner with trappers to thin coyote numbers on their property to give fawns a better chance of living long enough to enter adulthood.

It's also a rewarding activity that requires hours of dedication. Earl said that's one of the most attractive things about it for him.

"It's a real commitment," Earl said. "You have an obligation to check your traps every day. You're out there, trying to match wits with animals and looking for fine details of their movements. You gotta have a sign to know where to put your traps. They say no one knows the outdoors like a trapper because they have to be aware of the tiniest changes."

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Falling for Fall Turkeys

By Steve Griffin

Two springs ago, I blew fresh air through a call and over the lingering coals of clumsy spring turkey hunting experiences. I felt a fire of enthusiasm that peaked with a jake turkey dead in the spring grasses and then celebrated through multiple meals, a wing-bone call and a stash of fly-tying feathers.

This year, a mature gobbler made my day and my spring: more thrills, great meals and calls, plus a tail feather mount in the works.

And so now I'm geeked, in the way turkey hunting takes hold of a person, and I don't want to wait until spring for another round with a big bird.

I've mostly written about things I've experienced and, implicitly at least, succeeded at or even mastered. This one's about something intriguing I haven't done yet: fall turkey hunting.

Yes, the last, very last thing a hunter/angler needs come autumn is another diversion. Because as a season, fall is nothing like spring, when cabin fever, punky ice and bloated streams torment an outdoors person to distraction. Finally, emotional rescue comes in a gobble echoing through a re-awakening woodlot.

"And so now I'm geeked, in the way turkey hunting takes hold of a person, and I don't want to wait until spring for another round with a big bird."

No, we're talking fall — when early teal and later ducks compete with geese, grouse and woodcock for the shotgunner's scarce free time; when scouting and hunting whitetail deer becomes nearly a religious ritual; when spawning salmon send eggs cascading toward greedy downstream trout and the angler seeks both.

And now, the Michigan wild turkey has got a hold on me.

I got no sympathy when I called my longtime friend and contact Al Stewart, whose recently concluded 50-year DNR career included a long stint as the Wildlife Division's upland bird specialist and the face of its turkey program. There was no sympathy at all; Stewart has had the turkey bug way too long to think it a hardship.

And fall turkey hunting, he said, presents a splendid opportunity.

We talked, and now I am going in with my eyes open, for there are as many differences as similarities between the two sporting seasons.

Spring gunning is restricted to toms or bearded turkeys. Up

to 10 percent of hens have legal beards, experts say. In fall, birds of either sex are legal, reflecting the different aims of the two seasons.

Spring hunts are established specifically to provide quality hunting experiences, Stewart explained: the most sport for the most people with the fewest hassles. It's based on breeding behavior, and the male birds harvested are considered surplus to the population.

Fall hunting, in contrast, is prescriptive: it aims to maintain or reduce the number of turkeys in a specific area and use hunters to accomplish that. Open hunting units and quotas can shift from year to year, not to spread hunting pressure but to focus on it. As in several recent years, this fall's hunt includes the entire Upper Peninsula, nearly all of the Southern Lower Peninsula, plus a chunk of the northernmost Lower Peninsula.

The spring limit is a single turkey; in fall, you can buy a license a day until the hunting unit's supply runs out, the season ends or you've had enough.

Spring is the king in Michigan turkey hunting, but when Michigan's sputtering turkey restoration program finally produced enough birds for some limited hunts in the mid-1960s in the Allegan, Baldwin and Mio areas, they took place in the fall, like nearly all turkey hunts in the United States then. That, after all, was the traditional time for hunting and other harvests. "Heck, even Thanksgiving, Turkey Day, was a November thing," Stewart said. But some southern states experimented with spring hunts, hunters thrilled to call in strutting, breeding-minded gobblers. "It was a new trend," Stewart told me, "and we took it on."

It caught on like spring wildfire. Workshops statewide schooled new hunters, their numbers growing in parallel to the range and numbers of birds on the landscape. Coming warily to the call, the fanned-out spring gobbler claimed a spotlight between big game and small game, and he ruled spring hunting.

Still, in the late 1980s, some flocks needed trimming, and either-sex autumn turkey hunting returned to the Michigan calendar. Roughly one-third as many hunters bag about one-fourth as many birds each fall as in spring.

How do they do it?

A big practical difference between the two seasons is that, while spring hunting generally means subterfuge and subtlety — sneaking into a woods undetected, calling in the attempt to seduce a tom. In fall, you're most likely a disrupter, in the modern economic and political sense of the word, creating mayhem to benefit from its resolution. You bust up a crowd, and then wait for its reunion.

Stewart portrayed the most excitement when he talked about locating a passel of hens and poults

Pictured is a hen turkey harvested in the fall by a friend of the author, Tom Lounsbury.

As summer gives way to fall, turkeys, deer and other wildlife may share the same habitats and hunting areas.

and creating enough motion, noise and confusion to send them scattering in all directions.

By midsummer, he said, several hens will gather into a combined flock of a couple of dozen, all roaming together in search of bugs and other high-protein foods. By October, they'll be scratching through leaf litter and other ground cover with maybe a couple of dozen birds in a group.

Their effort is the key to your scouting.

"They do what I call the 'turkey shuffle,'" Stewart said. "They dig twice with one leg, then two or three times with the other. That forms a 'V' in the upturned and damp leaf litter," pointing in the direction the flock is going.

"That's your cue to imagine the arrows pointing toward your quarry, and sneak around to the sides of that path and get closer, see the flock, and bust the flock up."

Stewart said he once read of turkey hunters firing shotguns in the air to disperse flocks, but a rapid, noisy approach can do it just fine. Just don't be shy. "You don't want to just push them in one direction. You want to really disperse them in 360 degrees."

Then, having broken up the party, you hide, sit for 15 to 30 minutes. Let the woods quiet down. Make the 'lost' call, the kee-kee run. You'll hear other birds make a similar call, "I'm lost." "I'm lost, too." Yours is a plea for companionship.

"It's really effective, really exciting," Stewart said. "Birds can come from any and every direction. I've had birds I couldn't shoot because they came running in so fast they ran right by me."

Then again, you might get outcalled. "She'll come close," he said of a boss hen, "do an assembly call, and get them to all come back to her right there. She might call them all back and walk off before you can harvest a bird."

Another early-morning approach is to scout out a roosting site and "bust 'em out of that," Stewart said. "Or, if you can see them when they're roosted, mimic the next noise you hear from the tree," in hopes of talking in a bird when it flies down.

With roosted gobblers as with roosted hens, "Whatever they're doing, you do the same. When they fly down, they might come over to see who's been making that sound." A location gobble might work, although Stewart doesn't recommend it on public land where it might draw another hunter.

"Other hunters" raises another issue: Turkey hunters are exempt from hunter orange clothing requirements like archery and waterfowl hunters. Still, especially on public lands, I'll be wearing

at least an orange cap as I move through the woods, hiding it only when settling down to call. Even on private ground, I've encountered intentional or accidental trespassers enough times to opt-in favor of safety. There are lots more hunters afield, on all kinds of hunts, and I'd just as soon they all knew where I am and what I'm up to.

Sometimes jakes — immature male birds — break away from flocks of females and form bachelor groups. Stewart said their yelps sound a bit raspier, and while the same break-up and re-gather approach works, they're not quite as receptive as hen groups.

Adult toms? Come fall, they've generally separated from summer broods and can be found individually or sometimes hanging out in groups of two or three. They may roost near other turkeys or totally on their own.

"Hierarchy is always in play," said Stewart, "Year-around. They'll come to see who's staking out turf." You can make the most of that by making clucks or slow, harsh yelps

Turkey tracks can be a great indicator of where and when to hunt fall turkeys.

– tom yelps. "Curiosity never killed a turkey, but they will come and give a look" when you announce a newcomer in the area.

As in other approaches to fall (and spring) turkeys, scouting sets the scene for you. "The best way to harvest a turkey," said Stewart with a laugh, "is to be halfway between where the turkey is and where it (already) wants to go."

That sounds like a great place to be. So, here goes: this fall, there will be fewer salmon floats for me and some bow hunting sits skipped. Beanbag the Brittany may sulk in his crate about a few missed grouse and woodcock walks. Eager for something new, I'm gonna bust up some turkey parties and be ready for action when they reconvene.

Summer turns to Fall

By Emily Hansen

Is a Northern Michigan summer the smallest measure of time? It sure seems to go by quickly every year. Time flies when you're fly fishing...or something like that, right? I know I had a fun summer trying to improve my fly fishing skills. Early on in the summer, I caught a few small browns on streamers and I was able to land a brown on my reel that I painted myself! I also booked a guided trip on the Au Sable River with Jamie Clous. I caught browns and brookies all day on dry flies. Booking a guided trip is so nice to do every once in a while because it is such a great way to learn some tricks of the trade from someone who knows their stuff. Jamie made an amazing lunch in the middle of the river while I worked on my roll cast. He grilled chicken breasts in the canoe and made me realize I really need to step up my river-side snacking game.

This summer was my first year dabbling in Hex fishing. If you're not familiar, the Hexagenia Limbata (also known simply as "hex") is the world's largest mayfly. The idea behind "hexing" is getting to a trouty spot on the river and waiting until the sun goes down. This is when the action happens. The mayflies mate and fall to the water, creating a great feast for trout. In the darkness, you can hear the fish start to feed and slurp up the bugs. Standing in the middle of the river, in darkness, is a rush all on its own. When you throw hungry fish into the mix, it's absolutely intoxicating.

"As soon as we pushed off the river bank and started to float down stream, a storm started: a storm of Hex. There wasn't a single square inch of our bodies that wasn't covered in mayflies."

I wasn't successful this hexing season, but I learned a few valuable lessons. One evening, I talked my best friend Brittany into going out to hex fish with me (my friends are troopers). Brittany and I launched our canoe around 9:00 p.m. Outfitted with head lamps, we hit the water with hopes of at least hearing some massive fish feeding. Around 10:30 p.m., the bugs started — nothing crazy, like the few nights I had tried to go before this outing. Some smaller fish started to feed on the sparse meal of mayflies hitting the water. Then the bugs stopped, and of course, so did the fish.

I told Brittany that was it, and we should hop in the canoe and start our dark adventure down the river. As soon as we pushed off the river bank and started to float down stream, a storm started: a storm of Hex. There wasn't a single square inch of our bodies that wasn't covered in mayflies. Luckily I was wearing a buff that went over my nose and mouth or I

Each changing season brings with it hope for a new adventure, a new fish, a new beginning.

wouldn't have been able to breathe without dining on Hex myself. The bugs were so thick that I beached us on a shallow spot in the river and we just sat and waited until the Hex storm finished. It was a little uncomfortable at first, being covered in bugs, but it was magnificent that we were able to witness such an amazing hatch. It's a story we will talk about for years to come. I'll be better prepared for the next Hex season because of what I learned this year. Here's a couple lessons I learned the hard way: 1.) If you think the hatch is over, wait another hour just to be sure. 2.) Beavers will make your life flash before your eyes at midnight when you're standing in the middle of the river. That tail slap will get you everytime. 3.) Glow in the dark fly line is worth the investment 4.) You're going to look like a total fool at first, trying to navigate in the darkness down a river, trying to be completely silent. But, get out there and do it anyway.

After my adventures with hexing, I decided to try my hand at another form of night fly fishing: mousing. As of mid-summer, I haven't been able to land one on a mouse pattern. I moved a massive fish one night, and I set the hook too early. It's so hard to be patient when you hear the water explode in the darkness. I wanted that big, mouse-eating brown so bad and my excitement got the best of me. Soon enough, I'll be successful. I know what it takes to get dialed in on targeting a specific fish. Like I mentioned in my last story, it took me two years of steelheading before I landed my first. I had so many fishless days and plenty of heartbreaks right at the net. But that's what keeps us anglers going, right? If it were easy, it wouldn't be so addicting.

Although summer is always a hard good-bye, I welcome fall with open arms. It is such a great time of year to be an angler. The king salmon make their way up the rivers to spawn, and following behind them to feast on their eggs are my favorite fish of all: steelhead. As much as I enjoy learning new techniques on the fly, float fishing for Steelhead with my center pin reel is my passion.

During the fall run, I prefer to use beads to target steelhead. I would rather use beads over spawn most days. To each their own, but I'm a bead gal. My favorite bead company is called Slay'n Steel Co. They are American-made, hand-painted, plastic beads and local to Michigan. Slay'n Steel Co. offers a selection of various colors and sizes ranging from 6-16mm. Bead selection should be made based on water conditions. With the kings having just spawned, you'll want to "match the hatch." A natural looking bead color will imitate a single egg floating along the bottom of the riverbed. Peaches, oranges and eventually dead egg colors at the end of the fall run. My favorite natural color is called "Float Drop Soup." In a murky-water situation I like to run "Starburst," a bead

that was specifically designed for dirty water conditions. Running a bead and spawn bag combo is a great option for low visibility days. The owner of the company swears by this combo! "Big-Man Dew" is another personal favorite bead; that color, I swear, ticks the steelhead off and they hit it hard. It's a bright, chartreuse-yellow and might as well be named the golden ticket. Shhh, don't tell anyone I told you.

Fall, with the colors running and wonderful fishing, brings the masses to my tiny little hometown. The rivers are overrun and trash accumulates along the riverbanks. It's heartbreaking to witness every year, and a major downside to exciting fall fishing festivities. On September 18, 2021, I will be virtually hosting a clean-up day. To participate, go out to your favorite spot on the water and clean up some trash. Use the hashtag #keepourpreciouswatersclean to share your clean-up photos for a chance to win some fish art by yours truly! Follow along for future clean-up dates by joining the "Our Precious Waters" group on Facebook. Happy fall fishing, and tight lines!

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One Last Chance

By Shawn Stafford

I just couldn't let it go. It had been a good year hunting, and I was blessed to have three hogs and two deer in the freezer. But I wasn't ready to give up the season.

I was able to pull together a quick hog hunt in Texas during the summer, giving me a nice supply of pork for the freezer. Nervous about having enough venison to get me through the year, I doubled up on a couple of does during Michigan's early antlerless season in mid-September. I bow hunted North Eastern Indiana and hit the Michigan gun season in November with little luck. Actually, to be honest, no luck. I couldn't kick the feeling that I wasn't done for the year.

Considering a late-season hunt, I couldn't figure out how to fit in a trip to my property in Southwestern Michigan. The Indiana late season only encompassed two weekends, and I couldn't make either work.

Visiting my parents, celebrating Christmas with my wife and kids, then heading to my in-laws to wrap up the year had me full-up. Then it happened.

I received an invite from Uncle Vic to try my luck at a doe on his farm. Amazingly, he lives a few doors down from my in-laws. It just so happened that I would be visiting during the last two days of the late antlerless. It was another lesson in never giving up. You just don't know when things may come together.

As is usually the case, my family and I were loaded to the gills as we headed out when I got off work on a Wednesday. Hitting some heavy snow early on in the drive North, we were worried the trip might take longer than anticipated. Fortunately, it died off, and the excursion continued as expected, making it to my wife's parents at a reasonable hour. Getting a feel for the night and our plans for the next day, I texted my uncle and let him know I

The author and his son carefully analyze the sign at the point of impact hoping to gain clues as to where the shot may have connected and how arduous of a tracking job it might be.

would be there in the morning. He mentioned the garage light would be on and he would be up drinking coffee when I got there.

Much to my surprise, I was up early with the prospect of the hunt on my mind. Getting ready that morning went like clockwork, and I was on site well before first light. I was so early that the garage light was not on and I didn't get to discuss my hunt plans before heading out. Things happen for a reason. It was a good thing I was early because walking out on three-day-old snow that had frozen and thawed at least twice resembled a marching band and fireworks display co-occurring as far as my stealthy approach was concerned.

I had never deer hunted the property but was familiar with it from turkey hunting and helping out with chores a few times. I had reacquainted myself via OnX Hunt the week before and headed for a field edge near an inside corner I saw deer enter and exit the field numerous times in the spring. Locating a tree to back up to proved to be a toss-up between being directly on the field edge or having a limited line of sight due to being slightly below the field about 15 yards back in the woods. Ultimately, I opted for the field edge, knowing I had some briars and a decent backdrop to break up my form.

After noisily clearing out a spot to sit, I settled in to wait for the first hints of morning light.

I wasn't particularly fond of my odds having made such a stir, but I was overwhelmed with a calm feeling I couldn't explain. I sat in silence, soaking in the moment for all it was worth. Eventually, I heard another animal crunching along somewhere in the forest. At first, thinking it was coming closer, I wished it to slow down as shooting light was not yet upon me. It had to be a deer based on the weight required to bust through the crunchy snow.

It didn't matter, though, as the animal eventually headed in another direction and silence fell again.

The snow on the ground allowed me to see reasonably well before actual shooting light, so I peered through the binoculars hoping to catch movement as go time quickly approached.

As hard as I looked, I saw nothing that resembled a deer, so I sat back and got comfortable to wait for legal light to arrive. The woods came alive with all sorts of wildlife, but none of my targeted species got the message.

Again, a strange sense of contentment surrounded me as I became one with the moment.

I sat and transformed into a temporary fixture of the forest floor.

After some time, my daydream was interrupted by my phone vibrating in my pocket, indicating I had received a text. My uncle informed me that I should have hunted from his garage because there were several deer only a chip shot away. After a few texts back and forth, I realized he didn't know I was there. I had arrived so early he wasn't up yet and parked just behind his garage so he couldn't see my vehicle. Stalking the animals he was watching was out of the question due to the hard, crusted snow. Deciding to sit tight for the duration, I hunkered back in, wiggling my toes to try and get some blood flowing.

Birds came and went.

A squirrel nearly jumped in my lap.

My butt was numb. I just sat and smiled. When is the last time

The author's son points out the blood trail leading to the harvested doe during a track.

This is a sight all deer hunters hope to have during their season. While bittersweet, it reminds us that part of being a conservationist is helping to manage Michigan's wildlife.

you were alone and just grinned ear to ear? Not in laughter, though, but in pure enjoyment. It was one of those moments when you finally got it all right. Not because you just killed a wall-hanger or won the lottery, but just because you're in that moment. It felt good. I highly recommend seeking that feeling next chance you get.

As I continued to sweep the field trying to conjure up a deer, out of nowhere, snow began crunching to my rear. The sound was coming from directly behind me. Knowing the animal had somehow snuck close enough it would detect much movement, I had to turn to my left as best as I could slowly. Being caught flat on my butt with my back to a tree, I wasn't in the greatest position for a deer to approach from this direction. I had set up to pick one off in the field where I had routinely seen them in the past. As I strained to contort my torso as far as it would turn, then continue to twist my eyes to the depths of the far left corner of their sockets, I managed to pick up some movement.

There at 25 yards meandering, was what I was looking for. The deer was oblivious to my presence as it maintained its course due east. As the animal was distracted, pawing and nipping various shoots of plants, I slowly began to bring my gun around to meet up with the rest of my upper body. The deer was nearing a large fallen tree which would obscure it from my sight, as well as its own. Not knowing if the deer would continue its current route or unexpectedly turn as deer often do, I planned to take an off-hand shot once in position. It was very close, and I was getting more of a show than I had anticipated.

Auspiciously, no antlers were visible, making the animal legal for the taking.

Nervous I was sky-lined due to only having an open field as a backdrop behind me, I was ever so cautious bringing the gun up. Just as its head got behind the downed tree, I quickly anchored the gun and began peering through my scope. Just as expeditiously as I had readied the gun, in a split second, the deer jumped, turned 90 degrees and was hidden from sight. Getting a feel for the body language was difficult, but I could hear slow, deliberate steps in the brittle snow after a short pause. Realizing this was my chance to get set for a proper shot, I brought my shooting sticks around, got my legs slightly under me, and was now more comfortable facing where I hoped the deer would pop out.

"My butt was numb. I just sat and smiled. When is the last time you were alone and just grinned ear to ear? Not in laughter, though, but in pure enjoyment."

Catching bits of movement, I was still nervous the deer would veer in the wrong direction. It stayed mostly along the original course and soon was clear of the deadfall. At 40 yards, I drew a bead dialed in on the shoulder crease.

A pause, a fatal pause, occurred next. Leaping and twisting all in one motion, I knew the bullet had done its job, or so I hoped.

The deer crashed through a frozen swamp struggling as it

disappeared into the forest.

At this point, I was confident I had succeeded, but there is always a lingering doubt until you're able to put your hands on the beast and give thanks to it and the good Lord above.

Flipping back around to my original position, I leaned back, took a deep breath and slowly watched my frozen breathe exhale as it floated away. I closed my eyes and replayed the scene over and over asking what I had done to deserve such a gift.

Snapping back to reality, checking the time and forcing myself to wait, eventually, I stood stretching my legs and rear end until they were ready to cooperate once again as a standing bi-ped. Walking to the location the deer stood, I saw no hair or blood. Analyzing the tracks, I found a set that was clearly throwing up dirt, indicating they were made in haste. Taking a few more steps in that direction, I saw what I needed to in order to let the season go. Not in my mind, but in the physical hunt. My tag was filled.

Not wanting to disturb the area any further, I backed out to retreat to my uncle's warm garage to thank him for the chance. The chance not only to top off my freezer, provide me with a temporary reprieve from the rigors of modern life, but also for me to gather my kids to assist with the recovery. There was a stir of excitement in the air when I asked if they wanted to help track the deer. Quickly they bundled up and we returned to where I had sat less than 60 minutes earlier.

Starting where I was hidden and working towards the location the deer was when I shot, I pointed out the tracks I had seen earlier, indicating the direction the deer traveled. Crawling through the briars, they eventually found blood in the snow. Quickly they converged on the trail and the trio analyzed the sign as they progressed towards my trophy. The snow and heart-shot deer made for easy tracking, and their pie-sized eyes and smiles indicated they had found it.

My uncle was nice enough to make short work of the drag-out with his tractor and the kids played hide and seek while I handled the field dressing chores. Back at my in-laws, I took my time getting the deer quartered and in the cooler for the trip home and ultimately in the freezer as burger, steaks, loins, shanks for Osso Bucco, and of course the heart and liver. I never like to see the season end, but I couldn't have asked for much more of when the curtains finally closed.

Tending to post-kill activities is a family event whenever possible. Helping kids to understand where meat actually comes from and how to prepare it for the table is key to guiding future hunters.

Genetically Engineered Pointing Dogs?

By Russ Mason

My wife loves German shorthairs. She knows well enough that they (like mules) think about doing bad things and then carry them out. I, on the other hand, prefer Labs. I grew up with them, love to hunt ducks and find that close-working dogs are better when it comes to hunting in aspen. Besides, retrievers retrieve while most pointers lose interest once the bird is dead.

Nevertheless, I readily admit that pointers can be indispensable. My wife's dog, Lenin, for example, was a chukar-hunting fool. He'd range out several hundred yards and climb to the top of hills that I wanted nothing to do with. Pointers are a virtual necessity when it comes to hunting the high cold deserts of Nevada or Southeast Oregon.

But I digress. Pointers are fascinating for another reason, that being the 'why' behind the pointing behavior, per se. From a physiological point of view, pointing looks like a seizure. The behavior clearly is 'innate' and under substantial genetic control.

More broadly, pointing is a behavioral trait exhibited by many carnivores (not just dogs). The 'pointing' actually represents a pause that allows the predator to locate prey in preparation for a pounce.

When it comes to dogs, genetic comparisons among pointing and non-pointing breeds (the full genomic sequence for canines was published in 2005) allow for some interesting observations.

In 2015, a team of geneticists began to investigate whether behavioral differences between pointing and herding dogs could be explained by differences in one or more genetic loci. They chose herders for comparison because herding breeds never point and pointing breeds never herd.

Searching over 66,000 genetic locations, the team identified a genomic region on chromosome 22 in pointing dogs that was absent in herding dogs. Conversely, they identified a genomic region on chromosome 13 in the herding breeds that never appeared in pointing breeds. Long story short, the arguably over-simplified answer is that the seemingly complex behaviors involved in pointing and herding are mechanistically under the control of a few genes on just two chromosomes.

Ethics aside, the genetics conjures up some intriguing (if troubling) possibilities. For example, could pointer breeds be improved through genetic engineering? (The answer is probably yes). Similarly, is it possible to genetically engineer non-pointing breeds so that they too exhibit the pointing response? (The likely answer, again, is you bet – for laughs, imagine a pointing chihuahua).

The troubling bit, of course, is that there are few kinds of hunting more traditional than upland birds over pointing dogs. Nonetheless, it's also true that many hunters

lust after shortcuts to success and technological improvements (if not, you'd all still be shooting double guns and wearing Filson tin cloth vests like reprobates such as myself). Or, consider that the Michigan state legislature just passed a law making it illegal to use agency-obtained geographic coordinates to target game.

No doubt, I'm fascinated with the biological machinery producing the behavioral pointing (retrieving, herding) response. But equally, I'm against any strategy that would use that understanding to make it easier to 'cheat' (obviously, I think genetically engineered dogs, or wildlife for that matter, seems quite a lot like cheating).

Hunting is performance art, and "one of the last ways we have to exercise our passion to belong to the earth, to be part of the natural world, to participate in the ecological drama, and to nurture the ember of wildness within ourselves." (Jim Posewitz).

Editor Nick Green's German shorthaired pointer, Summit, has turned into a fine gun dog. Could he have been better sooner in life with some genetic engineering?

MPHI:
PHEASANTS FOR R3

By Jack Ammerman

I found myself in the middle of the Crow Island State Game Area one evening watching 60 ringed-necked pheasants sail into the night. I was interested in some of the details of the new Michigan Pheasant Hunting Initiative (MPHI) program and spoke with Troy Adams, a pheasant breeder participating in the release. He invited me to tag along, take some pictures and learn a bit about the release part of the program.

MPHI is a program that seeks to get more pheasant hunters in the field. The goal is to encourage new hunters, hunters that used to hunt pheasants but don't anymore, as well as energizing hunters that currently enjoy pheasant hunting in Michigan. By releasing pheasants on selected state game areas during pheasant hunting season, hunters could see more birds and thus, generate more excitement. New hunters could hit the fields expecting actually to see pheasants if they put the work in. Veteran pheasant hunters that used to walk the fields when Michigan pheasants were relatively plentiful would once again have the pleasure of hearing the cackle of a rooster as it took flight.

I pulled into the dark parking lot of the Crow Island State Game Area Panko Unit and waited for Troy to arrive. I wondered how he would release these birds. Would he drive and let one or two go, drive some more and then repeat the process or would he open up a crate and let 10 or 15 go at one time? I wondered how many roosters he would be releasing in all. The answers to these questions would soon make my hour-long drive worth it.

Under the dark, cloud-covered skies, a pickup pulled in next to me. I saw the pheasant crates stacked in the bed of the truck and marveled at how many birds there seemed to be. After Troy opened the gate, I followed him into the Panko unit. The area that we were traveling through seemed thick with cover. When the truck ahead of me stopped, I shut my engine off and grabbed my camera. This would be interesting.

I thought to myself that I now know something that many pheasant hunters wanted to know: where the birds were being released as well as what day they were being released. In the darkness, I thought, "If I could remember this hotspot, it would be the place to

hunt tomorrow morning!" (For the record – I didn't hunt!).

As the pheasant crates in the bed of the truck were being prepared to be opened, I positioned myself behind the truck with my camera ready. Troy had turned off his truck engine, and it appeared to me that he would be releasing more than just one or two at this spot. "How many are you releasing here?" I asked with a beginner's interest. "All of them," came the reply as well as "You might not want to stand there." I stepped aside as the first rooster went cackling into the night. I watched it sail far away and then set its wings for a landing. The next rooster was flung into the air and did the same thing. I thought to myself, "It looks like that's the area that's going to be the hotspot tomorrow." As the birds were released, one by one, they flew in every imaginable direction.

"The goal is to encourage new hunters, hunters that used to hunt pheasants but don't anymore, as well as energizing hunters that currently enjoy pheasant hunting in Michigan."

Some flew far, some not so far. One escaped the crate and hopped onto the tailgate and then onto the ground. It ran into the thick cover, and I could hear it scurrying away. It turns out that it was the only newly released pheasant that was still within 50 yards of us! The release site was probably the last place in this area that a hunter wanted to be the next morning.

I watched as one rooster, cackling into the dark gray sky, sailed over the tree line and seemingly off the state game area. I mentioned this and was told that beyond the tree line is a plowed dirt field that had no cover. "It may land, but it will be back in the game area by morning," Troy said.

After we dispersed the allotted birds for this area, we started up the trucks and headed to the Stork Unit. I had hunted this area in the past and was familiar with the layout. We headed through the gate as we had done in the Panko Unit and proceeded to a spot that had pheasant cover everywhere. The crates were readied, and this time, Troy's father, Don, began releasing the pheasants. I watched a repeat performance. These birds flew everywhere except where we were. Like the last batch, these were hard flying roosters that dispersed themselves all over the territory. Like Deja vu, one rooster busted his

Left: Troy Adams, a pheasant breeder, releases birds at night on the Crow Island State Game Area with his father and the author. Below: MUCC's OTG program helped to put up signs for the program. Pictured from left to right is Shaun McKeon, MUCC education director, Al Stewart, retired DNR upland game bird biologist, Ken Dalton, MPHI president, Makhayla LaButte, MUCC OTG coordinator and Chad Krumnauer, DNR technician at the DNR Rose Lake office.

way out and made his getaway into the thick weeds. I followed him in to try to get a picture, but he was on the run, and there was no Kodak moment in his future.

Troy told me that he enjoyed his work and that he looks forward to doing it again in 2021. He released close to 500 birds in 2019 (the second year of the pilot program was canceled due to COVID) between the Pinconning State Game Area and the Crow Island State Game Area. I thought of all the other state game areas that were involved and of the birds released in those. That adds up to a ton of pheasant hunting opportunities for new and veteran hunters alike.

Years ago, the Michigan DNR tried a put-and-take pheasant release program. Although I did not partake, I have spoken with many hunters who tried it and weren't happy. They reported that the birds did not fly well and you would have to work to get them into the air. I can attest that the roosters I saw during this release flew as hardy as any wild bird that I've ever flushed.

The Michigan Legislature passed Public Act 618 of 2018, which appropriated $260,000 General Fund to the Michigan Department of Natural Resources for a pheasant release program during fall 2019 and 2020. MUCC played a powerful role in this legislation. The idea was introduced by a member of MUCC, Ken Dalton, and it appears that the program has given many hours of enjoyment to hunters throughout the state. Judging by the number of vehicles in various state game area parking lots, the program is doing exactly what it set out to do — getting people back into the fields chasing pheasants.

The pheasants that I watched sail into the nighttime sky are not meant to be breeders, although theoretically, it could happen. They certainly will not all be shot, but predators have to eat too.

During the fall of 2021, the DNR will again start the process of planting roosters for hunting again. The funding will come from sales of a new pheasant hunting license required for all pheasant hunters 18 and older hunting on public and hunter access program lands in the Lower Peninsula. Those hunters that have the resources to hunt pheasants on private property only will not be required to purchase a $25 pheasant license.

Although the first pheasant license hunt hasn't happened as of this writing, I see this as a fine example of hunters helping themselves. If it leads to more pheasant hunting opportunities, more roosters taking flight, more veteran hunters getting active again and more young hunters hearing that rooster's flight cackle as it rockets away, then this new license would be a wise investment for pheasant hunters.

Below: Autumn Christenson, left, walks with Jimmy Gretzinger from Michigan Out of Doors TV, editor Nick Green and Jason Smith, also hunting, during an R3-specific pheasant hunt. This was both hunters' first pheasant hunt.


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Competitive Shooting is for Everyone

By Dave VanLopik

Do you want to be a better shooter? Hit more upland game with your shotgun? Have more confidence with your rifle on squirrels, rabbits or deer? There are approximately three hundred and fifty public and private ranges in the great state of Michigan. Many of these ranges are open to the public or accessible to the public for a reasonable fee. Let us take a deeper dive into the fun of sport shooting and how to get involved or become a member of a local club or range.

Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has ranges throughout the southern lower part of Michigan. There is a new DNR range near Traverse City/Fife Lake, too, on Supply Road. A DNR range is being developed in the Upper Peninsula near Negaunee. The DNR website also has a list of public and private ranges and sportsman's clubs with firearms ranges. Most of these public and private clubs and ranges have a website or Facebook page or you can also find their information at your local sporting goods store.

So how do we get involved? Jim came to my club one night as we were shooting an indoor gallery (.22 rimfire) pistol league. He knocked on the door during a target change. I asked if I could help him. He said he had just joined the club and wanted to watch to see what was going on. I asked if he had shot before, and he said he did a decade or so earlier. I told Jim with my best sense of humor: "We don't allow people to watch."

Jim looked puzzled. I told him: "I have a spare firearm and ammunition you can use." I went over the firearm safety rules and range rules with him while the other shooters visited with each other. I also went over the safety, magazine release and other firearm controls.

I coached him for a few strings

of fire, watching his safe handling of the firearm. Jim thanked me at the end of the night, and I invited him back the following week. Jim showed up the following week and asked if I had my spare firearm. He dug out ammunition to replace what he shot the prior week and more for that evening. The third week Jim came in with a new Smith and Wesson Model 41, ammunition and a smile for his "new friends."

I asked if he had shot before, and he said he did a decade or so earlier. I told Jim with my best sense of humor: "We don't allow people to watch."

It has been my experience that the shooting community is very generous and supportive with new shooters. Shooters, unlike anglers, (most anglers will not share their GPS coordinates or complete info) will share all their knowledge with other shooters, including tips and tricks. Most will loan them a different firearm to try, or even borrow for a shooting event. Short on ammunition? Someone will have extra to loan to you. Need a tool to do some minor adjustments? Ask and someone will help.

Most every sportsman's club or range has a few shooting activities they offer. Trap, sporting clays, five-stand and skeet are some of the "games" for the shotgun shooters.

Rifle shooters can shoot three- or four-position rimfire, rimfire silhouette, high-power rifle, service or military rifle matches depending on the club's offerings. Handgun can be precision pistol (bullse-ye), Action Pistol or IDPA, falling plate or bowing pin shoots. Cowboy shoots use pistol, rifle and shotgun and most participants dress up in western-themed garb. Three-gun events use the three varieties of firearms also. A lot of these events are open to the public, so you do not need to be a member of the club to participate. 3-D archery is also available and popular amongst sportsmen and women. All of these shooting sports have organized matches at the local, state and national level.

So how do you get to be a better shooter? Go to the club or range and shoot a local event or match. You will learn from others who shoot often, develop your shooting fundamentals and gain confidence. More importantly, you will practice more, make new friends, and have a new social group to "hang out with".

Be Competitive

People compete with each other every day at work, in life and in their hobbies. The friendly

competition of catching the first fish, biggest fish, getting the most bull's-eyes, or breaking the most clay birds is always present. Whether it is for bragging rights, a dinner or a drink — we all compete in some form or another.

Most local clubs have events or matches you can enter. The benefit of these local matches is you probably know some of the club members competing, and they are always looking for new participants. The local competitions are designed to be fun. Other competitors will encourage you to look at and even try out some of their guns or equipment. I know several competitors who routinely bring a full set of extra equipment with them to loan out to new shooters or those interested in participating. These local shooters are a wealth of information and can provide tips on the best equipment and techniques to shoot better. Local matches do not require a lot of time, as most are held on a weekday evening or morning during the weekend.

My local club holds trap, five-stand and sporting clays shoots for shotgunners. Rifle shooters have high-power rifle, rimfire silhouette, black powder shoots. Pistol gets involved in bowling pin and falling plate events, during the summer. In the winter, there are small-bore pistol, small-bore rifle and air gun matches indoors at the clubhouse. For interested juniors, there is a junior rifle team with weekly practices and occasional matches.

Suffice it to say there are local matches and competitions for every interest in Michigan. Information on local shooting matches can be obtained from your local sports stores, club websites and club Facebook pages. Some events are listed with the Michigan Rifle and Pistol State Association, National Rifle Association, Civilian Marksmanship Program and their websites.

Get involved and compete at the local level in your favorite shooting sport. You will have fun and meet new friends while you develop your marksmanship skills.

(The author has been involved in competitive shooting since 1979 in one form or another, and he shoots in local, state, regional and national events.)

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CONSERVATION *Through* EDUCATION

TRACKS Magazine inducted into Hall of Fame

By Shaun McKeon
MUCC Education Director

Since 1977, TRACKS Magazine has been arriving in classrooms throughout Michigan. For more than 40 years, children in grades fourth through sixth have had TRACKS Magazine to learn about Michigan's wildlife and natural resources.

Over these 40-plus years, TRACKS has seen many iterations. In the beginning, it was four pages of newsprint in black and white. The color print started in the mid-1980s, but full-color photos didn't start appearing until the 1990s. Older issues are full of intricate and detailed wildlife illustrations and drawings, while current issues stand out for their posters and wildlife photographs. Today's design of TRACKS has been in circulation since 2018.

2021 is a special year for TRACKS magazine. In August, TRACKS Magazine was inducted into the Michigan Environmental Hall of Fame through receipt of the Environmental Project Award.

Founded in 2010, the Muskegon Environmental Research & Education Society created the Hall of Fame "as a way to recognize people and organizations, both locally and on a statewide basis, that have made significant contributions to our environment over the years. The Hall of Fame recognizes individuals who are making contributions each day and those who have passed on after making their contributions. We also like to recognize non-profit organizations that are dedicated to preserving our environment. We also select an environmental project that has made significant gains in changing the environment for the good of us all."

As the editor of TRACKS since 2013 and with 67 issues under my belt, I am extremely excited and humbled to be accepting this award on behalf of all the MUCC staff members who have worked on TRACKS.

I also want to take a moment to recognize the dozens and dozens of clubs and their members who raise funds to sponsor classrooms in their local communities. Without these clubs, TRACKS would not be in the Hall of Fame. These clubs and their donations have helped more than 100,000 students receive TRACKS since 2013.

As I write this column, plans are already underway for the 2021-2022 TRACKS season. As a reminder, TRACKS Magazine features 16 full-color pages of science-based Great Lakes concepts. We publish eight issues during the school year from October through May.

TRACKS highlights a different Michigan animal each month and is loaded with information about habitats, ecology, wildlife and conservation. Aside from all of this great information about animals, there is also a poster of the featured animal and an at home activity that can be completed.

If you are interested in sponsoring a classroom or sending a TRACKS to a child in your life more information is below or on the TRACKS website https://mucc.org/tracks-magazine/.

Subscription rates for the 2021-2022 school year are $4.00 per student, per year with a minimum purchase price of $40.00 (10 students).

For just $20, you can have 8-issues of this fantastic youth-focused wildlife magazine delivered directly to your house through an individual subscription, too.

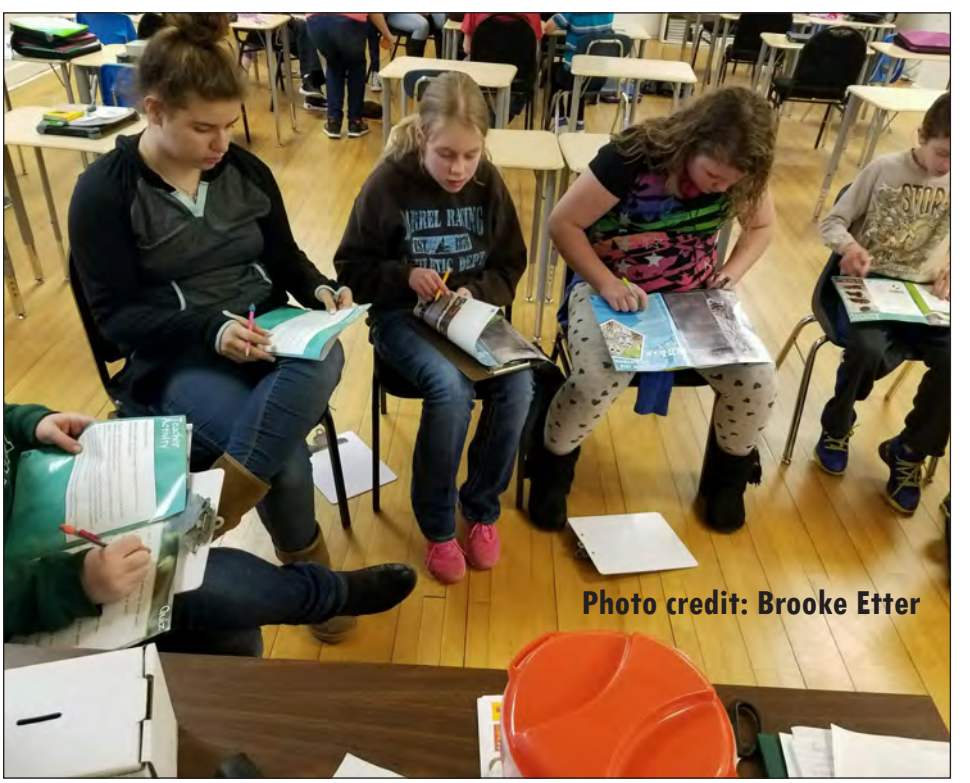

Photo credit: Brooke Etter

TRACKS

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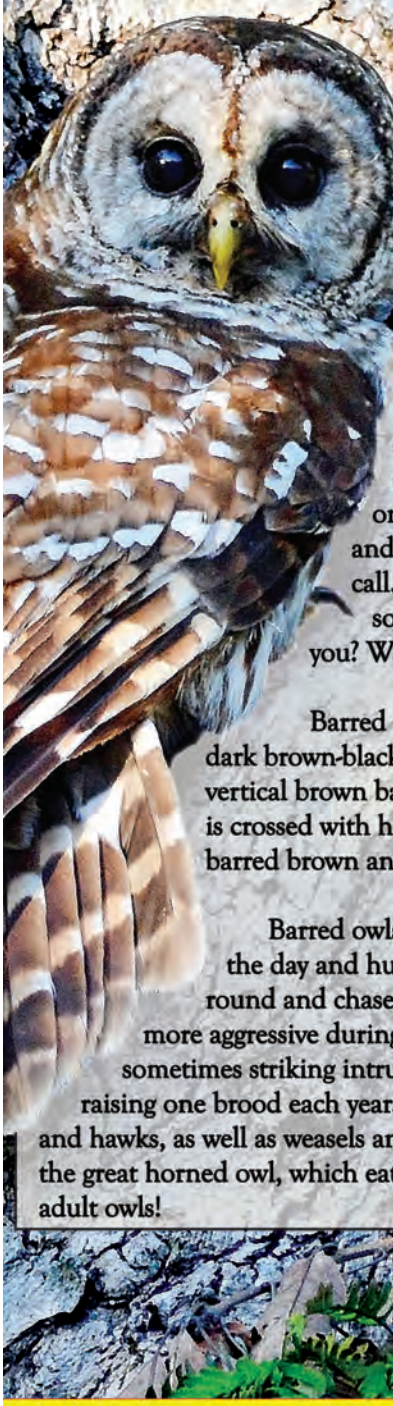
For Kids!



The Barred Owl

The barred owl is one of the more common owls you will find in Michigan. The scientific name for a barred owl is Strix varia. They are one of the larger owls you will find in Michigan and are very vocal. They are best known for their call. Many people would say the barred owl call sounds as if the bird is asking, "Who cooks for you? Who cooks for you aaalll?"

Barred owls are mottled brown and white overall, with dark brown-black eyes. Their underparts are mostly marked with vertical brown bars on a white background, while the upper breast is crossed with horizontal brown bars. The wings and tail are barred brown and white – this is where they get their name.

Barred owls roost on branches and in tree cavities during the day and hunt by night. These owls are territorial all year round and chase away intruders by hooting loudly. They are even more aggressive during nesting season (particularly the females), sometimes striking intruders with their feet. Pairs probably mate for life, raising one brood each year. Their nests are preyed upon by other large owls and hawks, as well as weasels and raccoons. Their most dangerous predator is the great horned owl, which eats barred owl eggs, young owls and occasionally adult owls!

TRACKS

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TRACKS Magazine is a publication of Michigan United Conservation Clubs. Issues are released Oct. through May each school year.

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MUCC

THE CAMPFIRE

Michigan Out-of-Doors Youth Camp cancels 2021 season, looks to 2022

By Max Bass
MUCC Camp Director

If the last 19 months have taught us anything, it has to be that life is unpredictable. This past summer was most certainly a wild ride. We had an amazing first week of day camp. Unfortunately, due to unforeseen circumstances (lack of summer staff), we had to cancel the rest of our summer camp season. This was a heartbreaking decision for MUCC, our staff and our campers.

The one week of day camp that we were operational filled the Cedar Lake Outdoor Center with laughter and smiles once again after being completely shut down during 2020. Our campers took part in our Conservation Connection theme week. They spent their week engaged in a variety of outdoor recreation activities and conservation education programs. Campers spent time learning how to use .22 rifles, compound bows and our oldest campers even had the opportunity to learn how to use a crossbow. Campers also spent time learning how to build survival shelters and start fires. They learned how to fish and kayak as well.

When our campers were not exploring their outdoor recreation passions, we were diving into various aspects of conservation education. Campers got to dive into our forests, wetlands and fields. During their forest lessons, campers explored the white pine forest that surrounds the Cedar Lake Outdoor Center. They learned about the animals that inhabit our forests and all the unique adaptations they have to help them

survive. While exploring the lake campers were able to collect and investigate the macroinvertebrates that hide along the shore. They also learned about the various birds that they might find living around the water. In the fields, campers learned about forest succession and collected different insects that call this ecosystem their home.

While campers learning about our natural resources and their outdoor interest makes our camp so unique, that does not mean we did not find time for classic camp activities. Campers were not only able to create awesome tie-dye and go swimming but got to sing and laugh along to our campfire performances.

As we look forward to the future, we are excited to return to a residential camp program in 2022. Keep an eye on our Facebook page www.facebook.com/MUCCCAMP and our website www.mucccamp.org for updates on the upcoming season.

We are always looking to recruit the next team of summer staff. If you know someone interested in sharing their love of the outdoors with the next generation of conservationists, please have them reach out to us at camp@mucc.org.

One Last Cast

By Nick Green, *Editor*

Fall is a special time of year for many of us — it's a time when we all slow down yet somehow manage keep our calendars full. It is always amazing to me how many weekends I don't have free in the fall when folks start inviting me on hunts.

This fall, though, I am planning to take a little more inventory of those I spend my time with and how I spend it.

When I started hunting on my own, it was a numbers game. I wanted to spend the least amount of time to harvest the most or biggest of something — rinse, wash, repeat.

Anymore, though, I get more pleasure and enjoyment from hearing stories of friends or seeing a buddy's young dog nail its first point. Those are the moments that make us a community,

This fall, my friend Abe's setter, Cedar, will have her first real chance to prove herself on the King and Michigan woodcock. We hunted over her a few times last year, but she was a puppy and the exuberance was much more entertaining than any real hunting.

My friend Taylor and his young dog will also be stomping through Northern Michigan coverts after their first ruffed grouse together, and I hope I can be a part of that special moment. Taylor, Dagwood (his pup) and I have spent many hours working with planted pigeons on steadiness and post-shot happenings — I hope it pays off this fall for the two of them.

The duck blind will be filled with a few familiar faces, including MUCC Policy Coordinator Ian FitzGerald who was able to harvest his first goose and duck last year and Shaun McKeon.

My dog trainer, Mike, will also be joining me on an opening day hunt for ducks in the middle zone. Mike is the reason my small Munsterlander, Calvin, is as good as is he. He has worked with me and all of my dogs at various stages, but recently, we have turned our focus to retriever work as we prepared for fall hunt tests with my lab.

Mike and I have only shared a blind once and we left empty-handed but smiling. I look forward to seeing a few more birds with him and having him watch Annie work.

Blake Sherburne, who writes for MOOD, is another person I hope to get to spend some time with in the aspen stands this year. His German wirehair, Jodi, did some spectacular work for us last year in early October. She pointed us a few ruffies, but we just couldn't connect. Maybe we can change that this year for the ol' girl.

Editor Nick Green poses with his lab, Annie, after passing two seasoned hunt tests at the St. Clair Flats Hunting Retriever Club. The duo hopes to carry the momentum into hunting season and looks forward to mornings spent watching the marsh wake up.

Who runs in your crew? Are you more of a lone gun or do you just end up wherever the wind may take you? I've learned that friends sometimes come and go and that's just a part of life. However, a true hunting buddy — they will be there until the end.

Those folks will be there when you harvest that booner buck, when your favorite dog passes, when you bag your first squirrel or trap your first coyote.

As I take my inventory this season, I will continue to remind myself how lucky I am to be surrounded by conservationists whose passion for the resource always tops the weight of our game bags.

Yours in Conservation,

Michigan United Conservation Clubs

OUR HISTORY

Michigan United Conservation Clubs (MUCC) is the largest statewide conservation organization in the nation. With more than 200 affiliated clubs and 40,000 members, MUCC has represented millions of conservationists since 1937. Whether it's the halls of the Capitol or on your favorite stream, MUCC is the insider for your outdoor traditions.

OUR MISSION

Uniting citizens to conserve, protect and enhance Michigan's natural resources and outdoor heritage.

OUR FUTURE

MUCC protects our natural resources while educating the next generation of conservation stewards.

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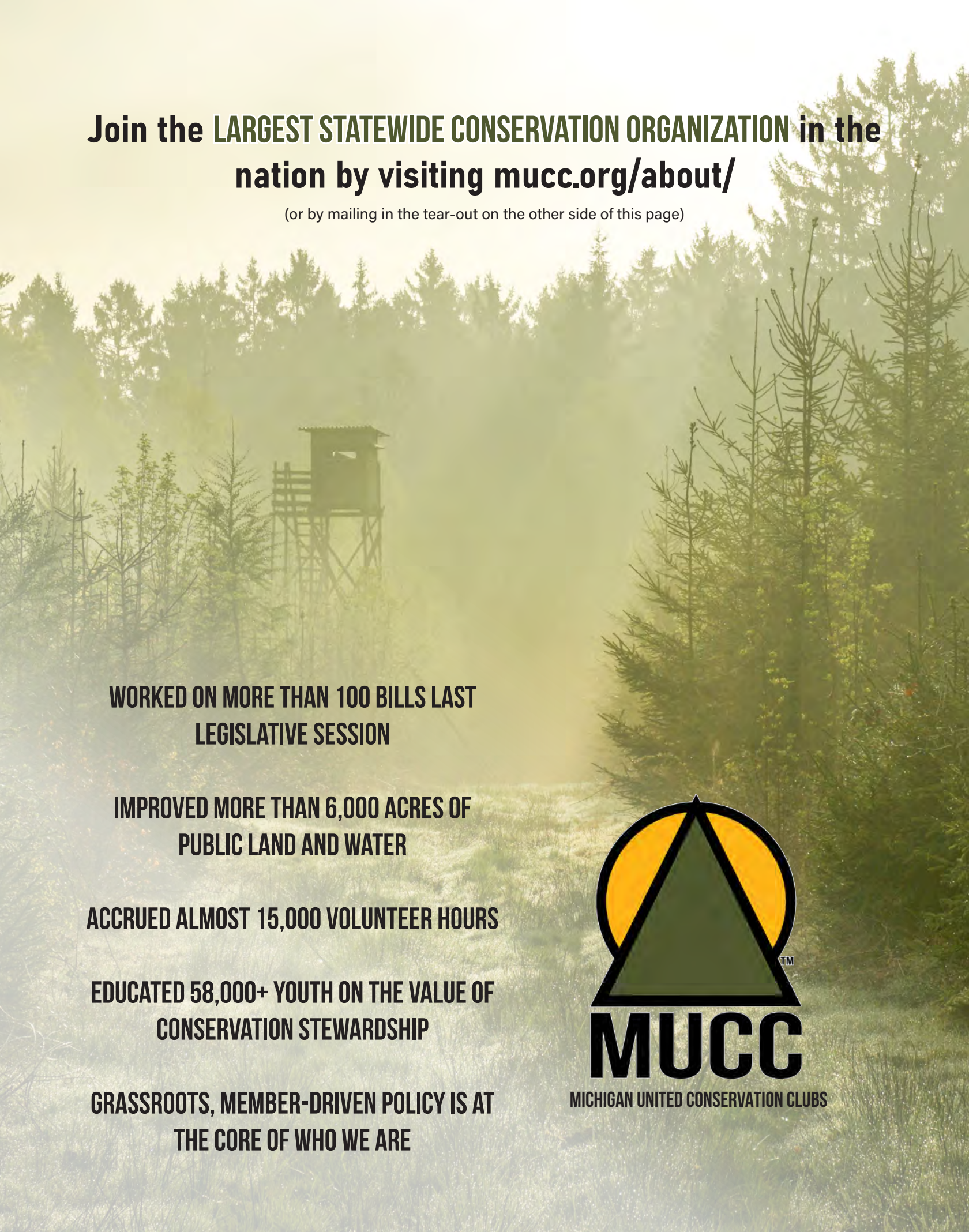

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(or by mailing in the tear-out on the other side of this page)

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