



## What's being done to protect the Great Lakes?

New and improved science tools can help managers and researchers evaluate current threats and develop management strategies to protect and restore the valuable Great Lakes ecosystem.

The recently released U.S. Geological Survey products provide free environmental data to the public as part of the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI), a collaborative effort to conserve the Great Lakes. The new [GLRI Science Explorer and redesigned GLRI website](#) (most compatible with the Google Chrome browser\*), launched in November 2014, offer critical information pertaining to USGS GLRI projects, and allow researchers to contribute their own material. The interactive [Science in the Great Lakes \(SiGL\)](#) mapper was released in December 2014 and provides information about current and past Great Lakes studies.

Researchers, managers and the public can use the GLRI Science Explorer to find information about USGS GLRI science projects, as well as publications and datasets resulting from those projects. It currently contains information about 74 projects that are completed and in progress, 66 publications and 11 datasets. Science Explorer information is stored in ScienceBase, a cataloging and content management platform developed by the USGS, which allows for contributions from USGS scientists and collaborators.

“We are eagerly seeking contributions of data or metadata to the Science Explorer,” said USGS scientist Jessica Lucido. The interactive SiGL mapper is a centralized place where researchers and managers can identify relevant scientific activities and access fundamental information about these

efforts. It was designed to help coordinate all of the scientific projects in the Great Lakes Basin. SiGL captures information about any type of scientific activity and provides details on how to access the data and results from those projects.

“SiGL can help researchers and managers strategically plan, implement and analyze their monitoring and restoration activities,” said Jennifer Bruce, a USGS scientist. “We hope to encourage coordination and collaboration among all organizations throughout the Great Lakes Basin with this tool.”

SiGL contains over 250 projects and 10,500 sites, including all the USGS GLRI projects in the Science Explorer. Over 65 organizations have contributed to SiGL, including federal, state and local governments

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## Early snowmobile season accidents are reminders of following too close dangers

MADISON – Minimal snowfall in the southern third of Wisconsin has snowmobilers heading north to popular trails where officials remind operators snowmobiles are like cars in that following too close may have unintended consequences.

Wisconsin DNR officials say two of this snowmobile season's seven fatalities occurred after the individual fell off the snowmobile and was struck by a following snowmobile.

The Wisconsin Snowmobile Education Course states traveling 15 miles per hour may require a reaction distance of more than 50 feet and a braking distance to close to 100 feet. A snowmobile operator traveling 60 mph may need about 260 feet of reaction time and another 300 feet to brake taking the total distance needed to just under 600 feet.

Another factor so far this year may be trail congestion in a small strip of northern Wisconsin where sufficient snow fall has allowed trails to open.

Frozen waterways require snowmobiler safety awareness

Snowmobilers in other parts of the state may choose to take to the frozen waterways which bring its own set of hazards. Lack of adequate snow on the ice affects steering, braking and overall control. Some lakes and rivers may have open or notoriously bad spots for ice.

Riders should use a high degree of caution while traveling on the ice and should always [CHECK](#) ice conditions with local law enforcement or bait shops. Carry or wear a

### Snowmobile accidents

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## A tale of two fish on Saginaw Bay

Anglers often associate perch with walleye because both species tend to use similar habitat and a number of lakes are noted for producing fisheries for both species. But there's one place where the marriage is not quite so happy: Saginaw Bay, walleyes are thriving while perch are struggling.

"Walleye fishing could hardly be any better," said Jim Baker, the fisheries management supervisor for southern Lake Huron.

It wasn't always that way. Although Saginaw Bay produced an excellent walleye fishery for many years after settlement, walleye populations went into decline in the 1940s. Baker said a number of factors—unlimited commercial fishing, expanding alewife populations, and overall water-quality degradation—combined to knock down their populations.

"Walleye were virtually extinct in Saginaw Bay from around 1970 until about 1980," Baker explained.

The DNR embarked on a massive re-building effort, but while stocking did begin providing a fishery in the early to mid-1980s, it wasn't self-sustaining because of heavy predation on walleye fry by alewives. Still, the stocking laid the groundwork for what became a remarkable recovery.

"We did not have hardly any survival of naturally hatched fish, but we were able to build a large brood stock of walleyes," Baker said. "So when the conditions changed—due to the collapse of alewife population—the walleyes were able to take advantage of the situation."

Reproduction improved so dramatically that stocking was deemed unnecessary. According to Baker natural reproduction was blowing away anything the DNR could try to do by stocking. Now, the walleye population is not only self-sustaining but is approaching, if not at, historical levels.

"It's an absolutely world-class walleye fishery," Baker said. "And they can be caught both summer and winter." If there's a price to pay for that success, the perch population is

paying it. Although yellow perch responded the same way the walleye did to the alewife population crash—with bountiful natural reproduction—it didn't translate into a bigger perch population.

"Yellow perch are now more of a forage species than a secondary predator," Baker said. "Adult walleyes, which had eaten alewives heavily, switched to yellow perch. Young-of-the-year perch became an absolute staple in the diet of adult walleye. Most yellow perch never make it to their second year of life; they're being eaten by many species of fish that used to eat alewives."

Adult perch abundance "is probably at an all-time low," Baker continued. "They're still out there and reproducing, but, since most of them never make it to the second year of life, finding adult perch to fish for is a challenge."

There are some angling exceptions, Baker said. In the spring, when perch move into shallow bays or river mouths to spawn, they can provide a fair fishery for a short period of time. Similarly in the fall, when huge schools of minnows move into in-shore areas or into river mouths, the perch follow them in. Those perch often stay congregated through first ice providing a short-lived, but fair fishery.

"Once the bay gets covered with ice, it gets a lot tougher to find them," Baker said.

So what we have at Saginaw Bay is a tale of two species. It is the best of times; it is the worst of times, for two of Michigan's favorite sport fish.

### What's being done?

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and agencies, tribes, universities and non-profit organizations. It provides information about general project details, specific sampling efforts, publications, data availability and access and contact information.

For more information about these and other USGS GLRI tools, please visit the [USGS GLRI website](#). §



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#### Position Statement

Representing a major interest in the aquatic resources of the Great Lakes states and the province of Ontario, the Great Lakes Sport Fishing Council is a confederation of organizations and individuals with a concern for the present and future of sport fishing, our natural resources and the ecosystem in which we live. We encourage the wise use of our resources and a search for the truth about the issues confronting us.

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## Lake sturgeon continue recovery in Rainy River and Lake of the Woods

A recent lake sturgeon population study in Lake of the Woods and the Rainy River illustrates the slow, steady sturgeon population recovery owing to cleaner water, effective fishing regulations and vigilant enforcement—a success story that one day will allow anglers the realistic expectation of catching 100-pound sturgeon.

“This strategy has worked very well,” said Henry Drewes, northwest region fisheries manager with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. “The fact that the lake sturgeon population has continued to expand in numbers, as well as in size and age distribution, under ever-increasing angling pressure is credit to those who worked together to bring about this recovery.”

The population study assessed and estimated the number of lake sturgeon longer than 40 inches, part of an effort to gain more information and a better understanding of lake sturgeon status, population dynamics and movement patterns. Sturgeon longer than 40 inches can be sampled with confidence using available gear,

and at that size the fish are approaching sexual maturity.

There are an estimated 92,000 lake sturgeon longer than 40" in the system, which compares to an estimated 59,000 fish in 2004 and 17,000 in 1989. “This is another high point in a continuing recovery success story,” said Phil Talmage, Baudette area fisheries supervisor with the DNR. “Results of the latest study show there’s a greater number of large lake sturgeon in the population than in 2004, when a similar study was conducted.”

In mid-April, 2014, in cooperation with the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources offices in Kenora, Fort Frances and Thunder Bay and the Rainy River First Nations, DNR fisheries biologists began setting nets to capture and tag lake sturgeon. The study area included spawning sites on tributaries, all 82 river-miles of the Rainy River below the International Falls dam, Fourmile Bay, and a large portion of Big Traverse Bay on Lake of the Woods.

From June through mid-September, biologists used gill nets to recapture sturgeon at randomly selected sites on the southeastern portion of Lake of the Woods, and the entire length of the Rainy River.

“This was a very ambitious project given the size of the study area, the nomadic nature of lake sturgeon and the sheer number of fish required to make a statistically valid estimate,” Talmage said. “We are extremely pleased with the results of this effort.”

Anglers who were fishing for lake sturgeon in the study area during the tagging phase helped by allowing biologists to tag sturgeon they caught. With angler help, DNR biologists tagged 1,291 lake sturgeon longer than 40 inches, then used that count and data obtained from the recapture efforts to estimate the total population at 92,000.

“We appreciate the cooperation from anglers who allowed DNR staff in boats to tag and release their fish,” Talmage said. “These folks were a valuable part of our research efforts.” §



## Commission hosts workshop to explore lampricide resistance And the development of next generation lampricides

Since entering Lake Ontario in the mid-1800s, and the upper Great Lakes beginning in 1921, sea lampreys—parasitic, jawless vertebrates that feed on the blood and body fluids of other fish—have had an enormous, negative impact on the Great Lakes fishery and ecosystem, caused significant economic damage, and changed the way of life in the region. After extensive research to learn about the sea lamprey life cycle and identify control mechanisms, the commission developed an integrated sea lamprey control program that combines lampricides, barriers, and traps to control sea lamprey populations and protect Great Lakes fish. Today, the control program,

implemented in partnership with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and U.S. Geological Survey, is remarkably successful; sea lamprey populations in most areas of the Great Lakes have been reduced by 90% of their historical highs!

The two lampricides, TFM and Bayluscide (also called niclosamide), are the primary weapons in the sea lamprey control arsenal. Discovered in the 1950s and early 1960s after scientists at Hammond Bay Biological Station in northern Michigan tested more than 6,000 different compounds, they have been successfully applied to the Great

Lakes ever since. Used to target larval sea lampreys in a stream before the larvae metamorphose into parasitic juvenile sea lampreys, TFM and Bayluscide are incredibly effective, selective to sea lamprey, and safe to use in the environment.

To achieve these objectives, the workshop was designed around four themes:

- Lampricides in the Great Lakes: What we Know;
- Evolution of Pesticide Resistance: Lessons for Sea Lamprey Control;
- Strategies to Prevent and Offset Pesticide and Antibiotic Resistance; and,
- Next-Generation Lampricides. §

## MI - Learn basics of ice fishing at DNR's 'Hard Water School' Feb. 28, March 14

The Michigan DNR is offering anglers and would-be anglers an opportunity to learn about the basics of ice fishing at its second annual Hard Water School. The DNR's Carl T. Johnson Hunt and Fish Center in Cadillac will host this one-day class beginning at 9 a.m. February 28, and again March 14.

This class will cover everything from how to set up equipment and how and where to fish, to when to be out on the ice, ice safety, electronics, and rules and regulations. The main focus of Hard Water School will be techniques for pan fish, walleye and pike. Participants will spend the first part of the day gearing up, and after lunch they will go out on the ice and spend the rest of the day fishing. After dark the group will meet back at the center to go over the day's catch and to review what everyone learned, and then will head to dinner at Lake Side Charlie's across the street.

The cost for the class is \$40 per family or bucket, which includes indoor and outdoor class instruction, ice-fishing rod and reel, tip-up, line, bait, various other tackle as available, a certificate and credit toward the Outdoor Academy.

A warming hut, augers and some shanties (available on a first-come, first-served basis) will be provided, but attendees are encouraged to bring their own equipment if possible. Participants will be responsible for paying for their own lunch and dinner on Saturday. Sunday is available as an optional fishing day; those interested in fishing Sunday should let DNR staff members know when they sign up for the class.

Registration is required. To register, visit [www.michigan.gov/huntfishcenter](http://www.michigan.gov/huntfishcenter) and click on the link for [Schedule of Weekly Programs at Carl T. Johnson](#).

## Public hearing set for Lake Superior lake trout emergency rule

ASHLAND, Wis. – A public hearing on an emergency rule designed to support recovery of lake trout populations in Lake Superior will be held by the Wisconsin DNR February 16, 5 - 9 p.m. at Ashland High School, 1900 Beaser Ave.

The public hearing will cover the 2014-15 emergency rule adopted by the Natural Resources Board at its December meeting. The emergency rule was designed to ensure the long-term sustainability of the lake trout fishery in the Apostle Islands area by reducing the daily bag limit from three lake trout to two lake trout of which only one can be 20 to 25 inches in length and the other must be longer than 35 inches. For waters west of Bark Point, regulations for lake trout remain unchanged; three lake trout with a 15-inch minimum length and only one lake trout longer than 25 inches.

Terry Margenau, DNR Lake Superior fisheries supervisor, said the emergency rule was necessary because population assessments over the last six to eight years have indicated that the decline in lake trout abundance is largely due to harvest. Lake trout are capable of living in excess of 40 years and do not reach sexual maturity until they are eight to 10 years of age. Thus, it's critically important that the stock be carefully managed, as the welfare of many stakeholders, including commercial fishers, sport anglers, and a host of associated businesses, depends on a strong lake trout fishery in the Wisconsin waters of Lake Superior.

Written comments may be submitted until February 16 to: Terry L. Margenau, Lake Superior fisheries supervisor, Wisconsin DNR, PO Box 589, 141 S. Third Street Bayfield, WI 54814; or: [terry.margenau@wisconsin.gov](mailto:terry.margenau@wisconsin.gov)

For more info: Terry Margenau, [terry.margenau@wisconsin.gov](mailto:terry.margenau@wisconsin.gov), 715-779-4035 §

## IN - Public hearings set for fish, wildlife rule changes

The Indiana Natural Resources Commission has scheduled three hearings to accept public comment on a package of proposed rule changes governing deer hunting, wild animals found dead, nuisance wild animals, cottontail rabbits, wild pigs, quail and pheasant hunting on DNR-managed properties, ruffed grouse, wild turkey hunting, reptiles, amphibians, exotic fish, sport fishing, and commercial fishing on Wabash River boundary waters and other inland water.

Among the proposed changes are rules that would allow the use of high-powered rifles for deer hunting, a 25-fish daily bag limit on sunfish (that includes bluegill), and suspension of the ruffed grouse hunting season. For a complete list of proposed amendments with additional information about each proposal, see [dnr.IN.gov/fishwild/2362.htm](http://dnr.IN.gov/fishwild/2362.htm).

The hearings will be:

- ▶ Monday, March 16, 5:30 p.m. at Spring Mill State Park, 3333 S.R. 60 E., Mitchell.
- ▶ Tuesday, March 17, 3:30 p.m. at The Garrison Conference Center, Fort Harrison State Park, 5753 Glenn Road, Indianapolis.
- ▶ Wednesday, March 25, 5:30 p.m. at the DNR Northeast Regional Office, 1353 Governors Dr. Columbia City

Public comments can be submitted online at [www.in.gov/nrc/2377.htm](http://www.in.gov/nrc/2377.htm). Locate the "comment on this rule" link in the Rules Docket for the Fish & Wildlife Biennial Rules Amendment Package.

Comments also can be mailed to: Natural Resources Commission Indiana Government Center South 100 North Senate Ave., Room N501 Indianapolis, IN 46204-2200

The deadline for submitting public comments is midnight March 25

### Contact Information:

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# BATFE to ban common AR-15 Ammo

In a move clearly intended by the Obama Administration to suppress the acquisition, ownership and use of AR-15s and other .223 caliber general purpose rifles, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives unexpectedly announced today that it intends to ban commonplace M855 ball ammunition as “armor piercing ammunition.” The decision continues Obama’s use of his executive authority to impose gun control restrictions and bypass Congress.

It isn’t even the third week of February, and the BATFE has already taken three major executive actions on gun control. First, it was a **major change** to what activities constitute regulated “manufacturing” of firearms. Next, BATFE **reversed** a less than year old position on firing a shouldered “pistol.” Now, BATFE has released a **“Framework for Determining Whether Certain Projectiles are ‘Primarily Intended for Sporting Purposes’ Within the Meaning of 18 U.S.C. 921(a)(17)(c)”**, which would eliminate M855’s exemption to the armor piercing ammunition prohibition and make future exemptions nearly impossible.

By way of background, federal law imposed in 1986 prohibits the manufacture, importation, and sale by licensed manufacturers or importers, but not possession, of “a projectile or projectile core which may be used in a handgun and which is constructed entirely . . . from one or a combination of tungsten alloys, steel, iron, brass, bronze, beryllium copper, or depleted uranium.” Because there are handguns capable of firing M855, it “may be used in a handgun.” It does not, however, have a core made of the metals listed in the law; rather, it has a traditional lead core with a steel tip, and therefore should never have been considered “armor piercing.”

Nonetheless, BATFE previously declared M855 to be “armor piercing ammunition,” but granted it an exemption as a projectile “primarily intended to be used for sporting purposes.”

Now, however, BATFE says that it will henceforth grant the “sporting purposes” exception to only two categories of projectiles:

## Category I: .22 Caliber Projectiles

A .22 caliber projectile that otherwise would be classified as armor piercing ammunition under 18 U.S.C. 921(a)(17)(B) will be considered to be “primarily intended to be used for sporting purposes” under section 921(a)(17)(C) if the projectile weighs 40 grains or less AND is loaded into a rimfire cartridge.

## Category II: All Other Caliber Projectiles

Except as provided in Category I (.22 caliber rimfire), projectiles that otherwise would be classified as armor piercing ammunition will be presumed to be “primarily intended to be used for sporting purposes” under section 921(a)(17)(C) if the projectile is loaded into a cartridge for which the only handgun that is readily available in the ordinary channels of commercial trade is a single shot handgun. ATF nevertheless retains the discretion to deny any application for a “sporting purposes” exemption if substantial evidence exists that the ammunition is not primarily intended for such purposes.

***BATFE is accepting comments until March 16, 2015 on this indefensible attempt to disrupt ammunition for the most popular rifle in America.***

## How to comment – from the BATFE

ATF will carefully consider all comments, as appropriate, received on or before March 16, 2015, and will give comments received after that date the same consideration if it is practical to do so, but assurance of consideration cannot be given except as to comments received on or before March 16, 2015. ATF will not acknowledge receipt of comments. Submit comments in any of three ways (but do not submit the same comments multiple times or by more than one method):

► ATF email: [APAComments@atf.gov](mailto:APAComments@atf.gov)

► Fax: (202) 648-9741.

► Mail: Denise Brown, Mailstop 6N-602, Office of Regulatory Affairs, Enforcement Programs and Services, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives, 99 New York Avenue, NE, Washington, DC 20226: ATTN: AP Ammo Comments. §

## Snowmobile accidents

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personal flotation device, always ride with a companion and refrain from riding at night.

The following recommendations will help everyone have a safe and enjoyable time on the trails:

- Practice "Zero Alcohol" until you are done operating any motorized vehicle for the day or night.
- Ride defensively, under control and with a safety mindset. Watch out for other snowmobile and

motor vehicle traffic. Be prepared for trail hazards like icy corners, bumps or uneven sections.

- Always stay to the right side of the trail, especially in corners.
- Be courteous and safe while riding in a group. Pull over at a safe location and let faster traffic pass. Faster traffic should also pass only at safe locations, at courteous speeds and distances.
- Always come to a complete stop at all stop signs and road crossings and yield to motor vehicle

traffic.

- Take a Snowmobile Safety Education Course. All riders at least age 12 and born on or after January 1, 1985 are required to complete a course before they can legally operate. That means anyone turning age 30 after January 1, 2015 is required to hold a valid safety certificate to legally operate.

For more safety tips, search the Wisconsin DNR website, [dnr.wi.gov](http://dnr.wi.gov), and search keyword "[snowmobile](#)." §

## IDNR offers more opportunity for youth turkey hunters

Young hunters should apply by Feb. 27 for access program hunts during youth season

SPRINGFIELD, IL – Thanks to a \$1.7 million grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service, the Illinois DNR is able to provide additional access for youth turkey hunters this spring. Through the Illinois Recreational Access Program (IRAP), the IDNR is accepting applications from young turkey hunters to hunt on private land on sites located in 28 counties throughout Illinois. Youth under the age of 16 who have passed a hunter safety course are eligible to apply for spring youth turkey season, as well as regular spring turkey seasons 3 and 4. The deadline to apply is February 27 for youth season and March 20<sup>th</sup> for season 3 and 4.

More than 12,000 acres have been leased for IRAP activities so far. Counties with IRAP turkey hunting

site are: Adams, Bond, Brown, Bureau, Calhoun, Christian, Fayette, Fulton, Greene, Henry, Iroquois, Jersey, Lee, McDonough, McLean, Madison, Macoupin, Marion, Mason, Monroe, Montgomery, Morgan, Pike, Sangamon, Schuyler, Scott, Washington, and Woodford.

Get Youth Turkey Season applications at: <http://www.dnr.illinois.gov/conservation/IRAP/Pages/YouthTurkeyHunting.aspx> and return it to IDNR prior to February 27, 2015. Successful applicants will be notified where their hunting site is located. Hunters also will be given a map and an IRAP permit allowing them to hunt on the specified private property. Youth hunters will also need to get an over-the-counter IDNR youth turkey permit once they receive their IRAP permit.

Youth turkey hunting on IRAP leased property is available during three spring turkey seasons:

Youth Season:

**March 28-29** (south zone)

**April 4-5** (north zone)

Third Season:

**April 17-22** (south zone)

**April 24-29** (north zone)

Fourth Season:

**April 23-29** (south zone)

**April 30-May 6** (north zone)

In addition to youth turkey hunting, IRAP also offers public access for fishing (ponds and stream banks), non-motorized boat access on public waterways, and outdoor naturalist (birding, nature watching and outdoor photography). Next year, IRAP will be offering sites for first-time adult turkey hunters and youth ages 16-18.

Info: Tammy Miller at 217-524-1266 or: [Tammy.Miller@illinois.gov](mailto:Tammy.Miller@illinois.gov).

## New experimental duck hunting opportunity has successful first year

The USFWS authorized Iowa, Wis. and Mich. to implement an early teal duck hunting season on a three-year experimental basis beginning in 2014. Teal are migratory birds managed under the authority of the USFWS in cooperation with state wildlife agencies, so decisions are made at a continental or regional level. As a result, the USFWS required the three state wildlife agencies to conduct and report the monitoring of this experimental season as a group. The [first-year report](#) is now available, and results demonstrated that hunters focused their harvest on desired teal ducks.

"We are very pleased we could provide this early teal season opportunity without impact on non-target species, as our Michigan waterfowl hunters demonstrated good sportsmanship and judgment in the field," said Russ Mason, chief of the Michigan DNR Wildlife Division.

Blue-winged teal are an early-migrating duck, so many teal have left the states prior to the opening day of

regular duck hunting seasons. Because of this behavior, the USFWS experimented with and approved special early teal hunting seasons for some states in the 1960s. In the Mississippi Flyway, the four northern states (Wisconsin, Michigan, Iowa and Minnesota) were excluded from this opportunity out of concern that hunters would shoot too many non-teal ducks. However, recent record-high duck populations and a desire for more equitable distribution of harvest opportunity led to analyses of the potential for adding early teal seasons for northern states. After working with state agencies to evaluate harvest potential, the USFWS authorized the northern states to implement early teal seasons on an experimental basis.

Following state-level public input processes, each state wildlife agency established an early teal season based on biological and social factors. The state wildlife agencies then followed with communication and hunter education materials for this new season. Michigan and Wisconsin held

early teal seasons Sept. 1-7, while Iowa's season ran Sept. 6-21.

Trained observers from each state observed duck flights and hunter behavior during the teal hunting seasons. Within the range of an observed hunting group, the species and number of ducks in each flock and whether the ducks were shot at or hit were recorded. A total of 88 observers evaluated performance of 160 hunting parties, which provided sufficient observations to generate statistically valid conclusions. A total of 699 non-teal duck flocks came within range of hunting parties, with only 44 shot at, resulting in a non-target attempt rate of 6.3%. This was below the threshold necessary by USFWS to protect other duck species not targeted by this early season.

"The early teal season provided Michigan hunters with a new opportunity, and our first-year results give us confidence in promoting this opportunity for hunters again next season," said Mich. DNR officials. §

## Successful recovery means more angling opportunities

The outlook for lake sturgeon hasn't always been so positive. Over-harvest through the late 1800s and early 1900s decimated the lake sturgeon population in Lake of the Woods and the Rainy River. Despite reduced harvest, poor water quality played a major role in limiting sturgeon recovery.

Water-quality improvements directly linked to clean water regulations beginning in the 1960s set the stage for restoration of this unique fishery. Better water quality in the Rainy River initiated a dramatic response in lake sturgeon reproduction and survival, which became the basis for population recovery.

"The recovery of the Rainy River is one of the best examples of how clean water regulation positively influenced angler opportunities in Minnesota," Drewes said. "This is truly a unique opportunity that continues to improve for anglers."

Based on the research findings and the success of the recovery program, lake sturgeon populations should remain strong and anglers can expect more opportunities to catch larger fish in the future.

"One day lake sturgeon in the 100-pound class will become a realistic expectation for lake sturgeon anglers," Drewes said.

For more info on sturgeon fishing, including seasons and limits, see [www.mndnr.gov/fishmn/sturgeon](http://www.mndnr.gov/fishmn/sturgeon). For more on sturgeon in Lake of the Woods and the Rainy River see [www.mndnr.gov/areas/fisheries/baudette](http://www.mndnr.gov/areas/fisheries/baudette). §

## Camping Reservations

Make reservations now for campsites and shelters for many IDNR sites for 2015. Reservations can be made online through the ReserveAmerica website at [www.reserveamerica.com](http://www.reserveamerica.com) using a Visa or MasterCard. For more info, check the IDNR website at <http://dnr.state.il.us/lands/Landmgmt/Programs/Camping/>. §

## Last day of Mille Lacs pike spearing season is Feb. 22

Mille Lacs Lake's dark house northern pike spearing season ends at sunset on Sunday, February 22, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources said.

"There's been some confusion because an extended ice angling season for pike continues through Sunday, March 29, on Mille Lacs," said Rick Bruesewitz, DNR Aitkin area fisheries supervisor. "Just like the rest of the state, dark house spearing season ends February 22 on Mille Lacs."

Mille Lacs anglers and spearers can keep 10 northern pike with one of those 10 fish longer than 30 inches.

Liberalized northern pike regulations were enacted on Mille Lacs to provide additional opportunities to harvest fish and take advantage of the current surplus of pike shorter than 30 inches. Northern pike spearing was opened this winter for the first time since the winter of 1982-83.

The new, liberalized regulations are experimental and enacted for only one year at a time. The DNR will evaluate the impacts of the northern pike regulations at the end of the ice fishing season. If there appear to be conservation concerns, necessary adjustments will be made. For complete regulations, follow the Mille Lacs regulations link at [www.mndnr.gov/regulations/fishing](http://www.mndnr.gov/regulations/fishing).

## Coastal program seeks board members

The Indiana DNR Lake Michigan Coastal Program is seeking nominations for all 13 voting members of the [Coastal Advisory Board](#). Members represent the coast area's various stakeholder groups and provide program input. Nominations are due by February 27. Address questions to [coastal@dnr.IN.gov](mailto:coastal@dnr.IN.gov). Review the information at [http://in.gov/dnr/lakemich/files/lm-CAB\\_nomination.pdf](http://in.gov/dnr/lakemich/files/lm-CAB_nomination.pdf) regarding board member duties. §

## MN - Register for beginner fly-fishing weekend for youth-adult pairs

A youth paired with an adult can join other youth-adult pairs to learn the basics of fly fishing from experienced mentors over a whole weekend from Friday, May 29, to Sunday, May 31, near Lanesboro, Minnesota. Applications are available in the events calendar at [www.mndnr.gov/minnaqua](http://www.mndnr.gov/minnaqua).

"Participants in this fly-fishing weekend learn how to fly fish, and also hear about aquatic habitat and fish management," said Deb Groebner, a regional specialist with MinnAqua, an educational program of the Department of Natural Resources. "After the weekend, they will be ready to fly fish for a variety of fish species in lakes, ponds and streams."

To qualify, youth must be 11 to 17 years old as of May 29, and each youth-adult pair must have less than 10 hours of fly-fishing experience between them.

The registration fee is \$125 per pair and includes meals, lodging, guiding services, equipment and additional materials. Sponsorships to offset registration fees may be available from angling and conservation organizations. This event is limited to 20 youth-adult pairs.

Info: [www.mndnr.gov/minnaqua](http://www.mndnr.gov/minnaqua) or 507-359-6049 or [deborah.groebner@state.mn.us](mailto:deborah.groebner@state.mn.us). §

## Hunter and Boating Safety Education courses

Register now for Hunter Safety Education and Boating Safety Education courses from the Illinois DNR. Spring classes are being scheduled, and since classes fill up quickly, check the IDNR website for class dates and locations. The website link for all IDNR Safety Education course information is [www.dnr.illinois.gov/safety](http://www.dnr.illinois.gov/safety). §

## Thick ice, above average water clarity likely to greet 2015 sturgeon spearkers

OSHKOSH, Wis. – With cold snouts full of wiry barbels and a row of bony plates called scutes along their backs, lake sturgeon aren't exactly cuddly.

But they'll get plenty of love this Valentine's Day when sturgeon aficionados from around the world shower attention on the Lake Winnebago system as the 2015 sturgeon spearing season gets underway. In fact, sturgeon spearkers will begin demonstrating their devotion to the majestic fish starting Feb. 12 when they cut openings in the ice of Winnebago system waters and move their shanties into place.

"Water clarity is the best predictor of spearing success and 2014 brought the best clarity conditions we've had in five years," said Ryan Koenigs, senior fisheries biologist for the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. "Water clarity this year looks even better, so based on current conditions, we are expecting a relatively short, busy and successful season. But realistically, spearkers love to be out where the fish are and they'll be happy regardless of season length."

Guided by rows of old Christmas trees that local fishing clubs set up to aid navigation on the lake ice, the spearkers are expected to use more caution than ever this year as they

venture out with a variety of vehicles in pursuit of their beloved quarry. DNR law enforcement officials warn that ice is never safe and despite its apparent thickness in most places, fluctuating temperatures and windy conditions occasionally cause heaves that leave the surface buckled and potentially weak.

Yet for the lucky holders of the 13,134 licenses purchased for spearing this year, Koenigs said the 2015 season offers particular reason for optimism. DNR carefully monitors the sturgeon population and thanks to continued strong reproduction and prudent management, this year's harvest cap for adult female sturgeon has been raised to 878, up 6 percent from 828 a year ago. For adult males, the harvest cap increased to 1,250 from 1,200; for juvenile females the cap is up to 430 from 400 a year ago.

To reach the legal harvest size of 36 inches, the fish that are taken will be at least 10 years old, while fish at the 100 pound mark are at least 45 years of age. In 2014, a record 106 fish weighing 100 pounds or more were taken. The largest sturgeon registered was a 161 pound, 77.1 inch fish taken by John Skahen and registered at Quinney on the Eastern shore of Lake Winnebago.

"Going back all the way to 1941, 10 of the 11 heaviest fish ever taken have been harvested since 2004 and nine of the top 11 have been speared since 2008," Koenigs said. "In looking back at that 70-plus year history, these are the 'good old days.'"

So, what do spearkers do with a 100 pound fish once they've landed it and completed registration at one of DNR's 11 check-in stations? While some cooking websites boast of grilled sturgeon accompanied by citrus-infused chili sauce and others talk of pan frying sturgeon nuggets, many families in the Oshkosh area will smoke their fish, Koenigs said. The firm texture of the flesh and marbling of fat that runs throughout make smoked sturgeon a delicacy.

"Many of the families that participate have done so for generations and everyone has their own sturgeon spearing traditions," Koenigs said. "We're pleased that sound, long-term management of the fishery has produced so many social and economic benefits for the region. There are definitely many reasons to love sturgeon."

For more info, search the DNR website, [dnr.wi.gov](http://dnr.wi.gov), for "[Winnebago system sturgeon](#)." §

## Learn to Hunt for Food: 'Soup to nuts' for foodies and novice hunters

Outdoors fans can sign up to take a Learn to Hunt for Food program. Keith Warnke, hunting and shooting sports coordinator for the Wis. DNR, says more adults are finding their way to his course through their passions for local food, sustainable living and a connection to nature. "Most of these students don't come from hunting families," Warnke says. "We start at the very beginning and show them everything. The course is really a soup to nuts kind of thing." §

## Sign up now for a firearms safety hunter education class

Now is the time for people to sign up for a hunter education firearms safety class offered by the Minnesota DNR. Anyone born after Dec. 31, 1979 must take a DNR safety training course and receive a certificate of completion before purchasing a license for big or small game. For a list of classes or to check requirements from other states: [www.dnr.state.mn.us/safety/index.html](http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/safety/index.html).

Classes fill up quickly but check the listing often as more classes are added daily. For more info: 651-296-6157 or 888-646-6367. §

## Rules hearing and annual Conservation Congress meetings

On April 13, there will be 72 public hearings, one in each Wisconsin county starting at 7:00 p.m. where you have an opportunity to provide input by non-binding vote and testimony on proposed rule changes and advisory questions relating to fish and wildlife programs in Wisconsin. Residents have the option to run for a seat on the Conservation Congress, or elect other delegates from their county to represent their views regarding natural resources on the Congress. You can also bring new issues to the Conservation Congress through the citizen resolution process.



## CG seizes 3 miles of illegal long line set by Mexican fishermen

CORPUS CHRISTI, Texas – Coast Guard crews seized a total of 3 miles of long line fishing gear set by multiple Mexican fishermen operating illegally in U.S. waters. On January 30, [Coast Guard Cutter Amberjack](#) sighted multiple vessels moving at a high rate of speed southwards the maritime border. Unable to interdict the vessels, Amberjack returned to the vicinity of initial sighting, where crew members removed 700 yards of long line gear late that night and recovered an additional 4,400 yards the next morning. The majority of the gear was found 35 miles off the coast of Texas. Each mile of long line has scores of baited hooks and is capable of catching hundreds of fish per mile set. The seized lines contained 175 red snapper, 16 sharks, 3 stingrays and several other reef fish. Approximately 170 of these fish were found alive and released at sea. §

## Oceans' increasing mercury levels may be harming fish

Mercury contamination of ocean fish is a serious global health issue, and a new analysis of published reports reveals that the concentration of mercury in yellowfin tuna caught near Hawaii is increasing at a rate  $\geq 3.8\%$  per year.

Data suggest that mercury levels in the ocean are increasing due to human activity, and if atmospheric mercury emissions continue to increase, the concentration in the waters off the North Pacific could double by 2050.

“The take-home message is that mercury in tuna appears to be increasing in lock-step with data and model predictions for mercury concentrations in water in the North Pacific. This confirms that mercury levels in open ocean fish are responsive to mercury emissions,” said Dr. Paul Drevnick, lead author of the *Environmental Toxicology & Chemistry* analysis §

## Rauner appoints new DNR Director

Governor Rauner selected State Representative Wayne Rosenthal for the Director position. Aside from being a State Representative, Director Rosenthal is a retired F-16 pilot and retired Brigadier General from the Illinois Air National Guard. He is an avid outdoorsman and a proud Second Amendment supporter.

Director Rosenthal will have his work cut out for him. The IDNR was once in the top five such organizations in the country. The problem is that for the last 14 years the IDNR has been gutted both in the personnel department and financially. It will take time and money to rebuild the IDNR. Let's make sure Director Rosenthal gets all the support he needs. §

## Chicago woman pleads guilty for making hoax distress call in 2013

A Chicago woman pled guilty to making a false distress call two years ago which led to several agencies launching a dangerous search and rescue operation in Lake Michigan off Rogers Park Beach, the U.S. Attorney and Coast Guard announced. Leona Chewning, 24, was charged earlier this month with one count of communicating a false distress message to the Coast Guard.

Intentionally deceiving the Coast Guard is a federal felony with a maximum penalty of six years in prison, a \$250,000 fine and reimbursement to the Coast Guard for the cost of performing the search. This search cost the Coast Guard \$13,613.

Chewning is free on her own recognizance while awaiting sentencing on April 22. Her plea agreement anticipates an advisory United States Sentencing Guidelines range of 4 to 10 months incarceration, and the court must impose a reasonable sentence. §

## Ohio 2015-2016 small game hunting seasons proposed

The 2015-2016 small game hunting seasons were proposed to the Ohio Wildlife Council on January 14. Hunting season date proposals are prepared by the ODNR Division of Wildlife and maintain many traditional opening dates. Proposals concerning Ohio's white-tailed deer hunting season were presented at the Ohio Wildlife Council meeting on Wednesday, February 11.

Open houses to receive public comments about hunting, trapping and fishing regulations and wildlife issues will be held on Saturday, March 7. Open houses will be held at the ODNR Division of Wildlife District One, District Two, District Three and District Four offices, as well as the Greene County Fish and Game Association clubhouse in Xenia. Directions to the open houses can be found at [wildohio.gov](http://wildohio.gov) or by calling 800-WILDLIFE (945-3543).

A statewide hearing on all of the proposed rules will be held at the ODNR Division of Wildlife's District One office on March 19, at 9 AM, at 1500 Dublin Road, Columbus, Ohio 43215. §

## MI Fisheries Division report highlights 2014 accomplishments

Interested in how many fish were stocked in Michigan's waters this past year? Want to know the results of egg-take activities to provide fish for state hatcheries? Are you curious about habitat improvement efforts through dam removals and in-stream habitat improvements? Have a general interest in how Michigan's fisheries are managed?

If these issues pique your interest then check out the 2014 Fisheries Division Annual Report, highlighting the various activities of the Fisheries Division during fiscal year 2014. It is now available online at [www.michigan.gov/fishing](http://www.michigan.gov/fishing). §

## DNR creel clerks collecting angler information this winter

The Michigan DNR reminds anglers that department personnel again will be interviewing anglers about their fishing trips. The DNR appreciates anglers' cooperation in obtaining critical data for fisheries management.

DNR creel clerks will briefly interview anglers to ask about how long they fished, what species they were targeting, what they caught, and where they live. In a few instances, the clerks will ask to measure or weigh fish and to take scale samples to gather key biological information on anglers' catches.

These efforts are part of the DNR's Statewide Angler Survey Program, a long-term monitoring program designed to track recreational fisheries across Michigan waters of the Great Lakes and selected inland waters. These data are vital to the management of fisheries across the state.

This winter creel clerks will interview anglers fishing Saginaw Bay, the Les Cheneaux Islands, Munising, Au Train, Marquette, Keweenaw Bay, Lake Gogebic and Little Bay de Noc. Starting April 1 and continuing into the fall, creel clerks interview anglers at a number of Great Lakes boating access sites, fishing piers and shorelines across the entire coastline to obtain estimates on the spring, summer and fall fisheries.

To see past creel results— [Great Lakes creel data](#) and [inland waters' creel data](#). §

## MN - More restrictive walleye regulations for Upper Red Lake

Beginning Friday, January 23, walleye regulations became more restrictive on Upper Red Lake because of a record December walleye harvest.

The daily bag and possession limit is two walleye, and anglers must immediately release all walleye 17- to 26-inches long. Only one walleye in possession may be longer than 26 inches. Previously the regulation allowed three walleye in the daily bag and possession limit.

Walleye fishing pressure and harvest continue to increase on Upper Red Lake despite more restrictive angling regulations that were implemented on December 1, 2014. "Fishing pressure in December was more than double compared to last December," said Gary Barnard, Bemidji area fisheries supervisor. "High walleye catch rates and ideal ice travel conditions attracted a record number of walleye anglers to Upper Red Lake this winter."

Walleye harvest is up 57 percent from estimates for a comparable time period last year, requiring some action to help curtail excessive winter harvest. Upper Red Lake harvest restrictions are necessary to comply with a joint walleye harvest plan agreement with the Red Lake Band of Chippewa. For more information on Red Lake fishing regulations, see [www.mndnr.gov/regulations/fishing](http://www.mndnr.gov/regulations/fishing). §

## Becoming an Outdoors-Woman winter cabin/ski/snowshoe workshop

The Michigan Department of Natural Resources' Becoming an Outdoors-Woman program will offer a Beyond BOW winter cabin ski/snowshoe workshop for women. Scheduled for the weekend of March 6-8, 2015, the program is designed for women who have previous cross-country ski and snowshoe experience and would like to expand on their skills and abilities.

The workshop starts at 6 p.m. Friday, March 6, at [Wilderness State Park](#), 903 Wilderness Park Drive, near Carp Lake, Michigan. Participants are asked to bring their own camping gear. See registration papers for more details.

"To participate in this Beyond BOW workshop, everyone must have solid previous experience with cross-country skiing and snowshoeing," said Sharon Pitz, Becoming an Outdoors-Woman program coordinator. "The March workshop aims to help women expand on the skills they may have been taught at previous workshops – things like back-country cooking, reading and using maps and compasses, wilderness first aid, snowshoeing and skiing."

The trip will include both days at Wilderness State Park. Participants should prepare to spend plenty of time outside. The cost is \$115 and includes lodging and some meals. Participants will stay in a rustic bunkhouse that will sleep up to 24 women in 12 sets of bunk beds.

Participants must be 18 or older. Enrollment is limited to 24 people and the registration deadline is February 16. Class information and registration materials are available online at [www.michigan.gov/bow](http://www.michigan.gov/bow) and registration can be paid online at [www.michigan.gov/estore](http://www.michigan.gov/estore). For more info; Sharon Pitz 906-228-6561, [pitzs@michigan.gov](mailto:pitzs@michigan.gov). §

### ☞ THINK ABOUT IT ☞

"The very atmosphere of firearms everywhere restrains evil interference — they deserve a place of honor with all that is good"

*George Washington*

"Patriotism is supporting your country all the time, and your government when it deserves it."

*Mark Twain*

## MI non-resident fishing license discounted for 2015

A Michigan DNR discount of just over 10 percent has been approved for non-resident annual fishing licenses for 2015. The cost of the non-resident annual fishing license will go from \$76 to \$68 starting on March 1, 2015.

Anglers still will have five options to choose from when making their purchase in 2015. All fishing licenses are good for all species. All 2015 fishing licenses will be good March 1, 2015, through March 31, 2016.

- Resident Annual - \$26
- Non-Resident Annual - \$68
- Senior Annual (for residents age 65 or older) - \$11
- 24-Hour (resident or non-resident) - \$10
- 72-Hour (resident or non-resident) - \$30

Non-residents also can purchase the Hunt/Fish combo license for \$266 and residents can purchase it for \$76. The Hunt/Fish combo consists of a base license, annual fishing license and two deer tags. A base license is not required when just purchasing a fishing license. For more information on fishing in Michigan, visit [www.michigan.gov/fishing](http://www.michigan.gov/fishing). §

## A renewed effort to reestablish access at Cape Hatteras

Legislation to restore reasonable public access to the Cape Hatteras National Seashore Recreational Area in North Carolina has passed the Senate and is expected to be signed into law. Off-road vehicle (ORV) access to the seashore is essential for surf fishing from the beaches, as well as for many other recreational activities. In December 2010, the National Park Service approved an ORV management plan that closed extensive areas of the seashore to the public and severely limited ORV access to provide protections for shorebirds and other wildlife. §

## Women new to bow hunting can learn basics in DNR class

Women interested in becoming archers or learning how to bow hunt can sign up for a three-part class series on archery basics, equipment, target shooting and hunting skills in a class series starting February 28.

There are two options for these classes. In a beginner's series, women new to archery or with limited experience will learn archery basics, equipment and target shooting. And a hunting archery series is designed for women with intermediate archery skills who are interested learning how to bow hunt. Both classes start February 28 in the Schwan Center at the National Sports Center in Blaine. Subsequent classes will be Sunday, March 15. For more info: [www.mndnr.gov/bow](http://www.mndnr.gov/bow) or call 888-646-6367 and request a printed copy of the catalog. To register, contact Bylander at [linda.bylander@state.mn.us](mailto:linda.bylander@state.mn.us) or 218-833-8628. §

## Register for first-timer mentored turkey hunt by Monday, Feb. 23

Those who want to hunt turkeys for the first time this spring have until Monday, February 23, to apply to hunt under the guidance of experienced National Wild Turkey Federation volunteers, the Minnesota DNR said. Applications are available at [www.mndnr.gov/hunting/turkey](http://www.mndnr.gov/hunting/turkey).

This year there are hunts designed for both youth and adult hunters. Youth ages 12 to 17 will hunt April 18 and 19. Adults will hunt, May 16 and May 17.

To be eligible, a youth hunter must be age 12 to 17 on or before Saturday, April 18; have a valid firearms safety certificate; and be accompanied by a parent or guardian. If there are more applications than available mentors, participants will be selected in a random lottery. For more information see [www.mndnr.gov/hunting/turkey](http://www.mndnr.gov/hunting/turkey). §

## MN DNR announces new special angling regulations

Angling regulations will change on nearly three dozen waters this year, according to the Minnesota DNR. Among the changes: Anglers will see more restrictive walleye regulations in and around Saganaga Lake in Cook County; Lake Winnibigoshish will have a relaxed, or narrower, protected slot limit for walleye; and northern pike special regulations will be removed on Big Birch Lake in Todd County. Changed and new special and experimental regulations will be posted at public accesses on affected lakes and become effective March 1, except for those involving Sand Lake and connected waters, which will be effective in 2016. §

## 2014 second best year for safe hunting in New York

The 2014 New York hunting season closed with the second lowest number of hunting related-shooting incidents on record.

New York's hunting incident rate (incidents per 100,000 hunters) has fallen by more than 75% since the 1960s. The past five-year average is down to 4.3 incidents per 100,000 hunters, compared to 19 per 100,000 in the 1960s.

A total of 22 hunting incidents occurred in 2014, including one fatality which occurred while hunting small game. Eight of this year's accidents were self-inflicted, eleven involved members of the same hunting party and only three occurred where the victim and shooter did not know each other. This was the first year on record without an incident occurring during the spring turkey season. The lowest total number of hunting incidents in any year occurred just a year ago (19 incidents in 2013).

Sportsman education is an essential background to have in the field and teaches future sportsmen and sportswomen how to be safe, responsible and ethical hunters.

## Providing better opportunities for hunters with disabilities

If you ask Michigan conservation officer Dave Painter, he'll tell you his relationship with his sometimes hunting partner Robbie Ivey was pretty unlikely. Painter, who is assigned to Iron County in the western Upper Peninsula, was having processed photos he'd recently taken of a black bear when he got a phone call about a law-enforcement situation. He asked the attendant to look out for his photos. He'd be back.

When he returned, Carrie Ivey, who worked at the processor, told Painter that she couldn't help noticing the pictures and asked if he might spare a photo for her son, who had his room decorated with wildlife art. During the ensuing conversation, Ivey—who'd lost her volunteer firefighter husband to a car accident while he was responding to an emergency—informed Painter that her 12-year-old youngster had a physical disability. Painter offered to take him hunting sometime. The youngster, who has muscular dystrophy and uses a wheelchair, was all about it.

Painter is one of 189 men and women who serve as Michigan conservation officers and one of roughly 1,300 full-time employees in the Michigan Department of Natural Resources. Like Painter, many of these employees have a passion for the outdoors and a strong desire to serve people with disabilities. That service takes the form of ad hoc volunteer efforts like Painter's, and a number of programs aimed specifically at people with disabilities, including programs such as Michigan Operation Freedom Outdoors, which serves many veterans.

After his initial discussion with Carrie Ivey, Painter contacted some members of the Escanaba chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation. The chapter has a program called Wheeling Sportsmen designed to aid the non-ambulatory. Painter set up a spring hunt and the club gave him access to a breath-activated piece of equipment, with a camera on a scope, which allows hunters without the use

of their hands to aim and shoot a firearm.

Robbie harvested a "nice tom," Painter recounted. That outing was only the beginning.

"We've kind of turned into hunting buddies," said Painter, who has helped Robbie collect three bears, three deer and two turkeys now. "He's a neat kid."

Joe Robison, a DNR wildlife biologist supervisor in southeast Michigan, has developed a similar relationship with 17-year-old Brik Jacobs, who was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis and now uses a wheelchair. Robison has taken Brik on successful elk (at a game preserve) and turkey hunts and on a waterfowl hunt that didn't result in any game in the bag, "but he had fun," Robison said.

Robison has access to adaptive equipment through the Passing Along The Heritage Foundation (PATH)—a nonprofit organization begun by former Natural Resources Commissioner Bob Garner and Garner's buddy, Bob Knoop—that helps persons with disabilities participate in outdoor recreation. PATH has created a guide-training program to make sure volunteers who are taking hunters into the field have basic emergency health-care knowledge (such as CPR) and the ability to accommodate hunters with special needs.

"Every year we take a few individuals—accident victims, stroke victims or others with disabilities—hunting for turkey, deer or elk," Robison said. "It's pretty rewarding helping out individuals like that, getting them out to enjoy the things that we all love to do."

The PATH Foundation partners with numerous organizations, such as Michigan Operation Freedom Outdoors, to create more opportunities for more folks.

The Operation Freedom Outdoors program is a partnership that includes the DNR, Zero Day, the Eisenhower Foundation and other groups. Centered around the

Sharonville State Game Area, Operation Freedom Outdoors provides guide services and specialized equipment to individuals with disabilities—including many disabled veterans—so they can experience opportunities similar to those of able-bodied hunters.

This year, Operation Freedom Outdoors took a few hunters out during the two-day Liberty Hunt in September. The Liberty Hunt is open to 100-percent disabled veterans, those who have been issued a permit by the DNR to hunt from a standing vehicle or use a laser-sighting devise, or those who are legally blind. The group also enabled 15 hunters to go afield during the four-day Independence Hunt in October.

"We had to hold a lottery," said the organization's Tom Jones, who coordinates events for disabled vets. "We had more folks who wanted to come than we could accommodate."

Jones said the group has use of three permanent 8-foot-by-8-foot blinds that are easily accessible and five track chairs for those with severe mobility impairments. More of both will be available next year.

"The track chairs are pretty much tanks," Jones said. "They have tank treads and with a full charge they're good for 10 miles. It's an amazing piece of equipment, comfortable, and the terrain is not an issue."

Although the special hunting seasons are finished for the year Jones will continue to take hunters on an individual basis and has even taken folks out just to take photographs. "We're reconnecting people with the outdoors for the therapeutic value of it and letting them know they can still pursue those opportunities," Jones said.

This year, Operation Freedom Outdoors was able to put Robert Ludwick, Jr, a 42-year-old Navy vet with a number of debilitating injuries on a hunt, accompanied by his 11-year-old son. Ludwick wound up taking a nine-point buck. "A very big one at that," Ludwick said. "I think

what Operation Freedom Outdoors has going on is needed. It's spot on."

And this isn't the only military-related program enabling disabled folks to go hunting. For years, the Michigan Department of Military and Veterans Affairs has provided hunting opportunities for those with disabilities at Fort Custer Training Center, a 7,500-acre Michigan National Guard base not far from Battle Creek.

Jonathon Edgerly, a natural resources analyst with Military and Veterans Affairs, said, "We've been offering opportunities for disabled hunters at the fort for 10-plus years now, providing blinds and people to sit with them."

But Edgerly has focused on "the Freedom Hunt," which is held during the Independence Hunt season in mid-October and is open to the same hunters who are eligible for the Liberty Hunt.

"We hunt on about 3,000 acres," Edgerly said. "The whole event happens at the fort—housing, mess hall and hunting." Meanwhile, Edgerly said the fort continues to host hunters with disabilities during the regular seasons—deer and turkey—with a handful of people participating.

There are more opportunities than just these. The DNR has accessible hunting blinds for those with disabilities at a number of game

areas, including Maple River and at the Rifle River State Recreation Area. The DNR's new GEMS, Grouse Enhanced Management Systems, are designed for hunters who are maybe not as mobile as they once were, but can manage a walking path.

No one is guaranteeing it will be easy, but thanks to the efforts of the DNR, its employees and plenty of volunteers and dedicated partners, people with disabilities who want to hunt are getting more opportunities than before.

Learn more about the state's variety of hunting seasons on the DNR website [www.michigan.gov/hunting](http://www.michigan.gov/hunting). §

#### **Other Breaking News Items:**

(Click on title or URL to read full article)

#### **[Lake Michigan alewife population in danger](#)**

According to biologists, most of what remains of the alewife population is a single year class from 2010. A similar scenario in Lake Huron led to a veritable extinction of alewives, followed quickly by the collapse of the Chinook fishery

#### **[As engineers mull lock redesign, Michigan AG calls for 'action' on Asian carp](#)**

Michigan's attorney general renewed a call for permanently separating Lake Michigan from the Mississippi River basin in Illinois amid the ongoing fracas over a solution to keep Asian carp out of the Great Lakes

#### **[Upper Peninsula wind turbines kill eagles, other protected species, lawsuit says](#)**

Some residents of Garden Peninsula, a scenic Upper Peninsula community on Lake Michigan's northern shore, say power-generating turbines have hurt their quality of life while killing birds, including eagles and other protected species, on migratory routes.

#### **[Obama budget seeks \\$50 million cut in program spearheading Great Lakes environment restoration](#)**

The president's spending plan requests \$250 million for the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, down from \$300 million appropriated for this year.

#### **[Great Lakes rebound, but rising tides pose problems](#)**

The return of higher waters isn't necessarily welcomed by all.

#### **[Survey finds invasive snail in Lake Ontario, St. Lawrence River that could threaten waterfowl](#)**

The invasive species can carry three types of intestinal parasites that can injure and kill waterfowl such as duck

#### **[Asian carp may be creeping closer to Great Lakes](#)**

Presence of DNA does not necessarily mean that live Asian carp are now on Lake Michigan's doorstep, but the latest findings lead environmentalists to say that the Asian carp threat now looks more imminent than ever before.

#### **[Ohio game biologists, hunters spar over size of Ohio deer herd](#)**

Mike Tonkovich was a marked man at the first statewide Ohio Deer Summit on Saturday at the Ohio Division of Wildlife district office. "If I'm hated equally by both hunters and farmers, then I must be doing my job," said Tonkovich, in charge of managing Ohio's white-tailed deer.

End