

# Protecting the bulrush beds on Anglers Bay



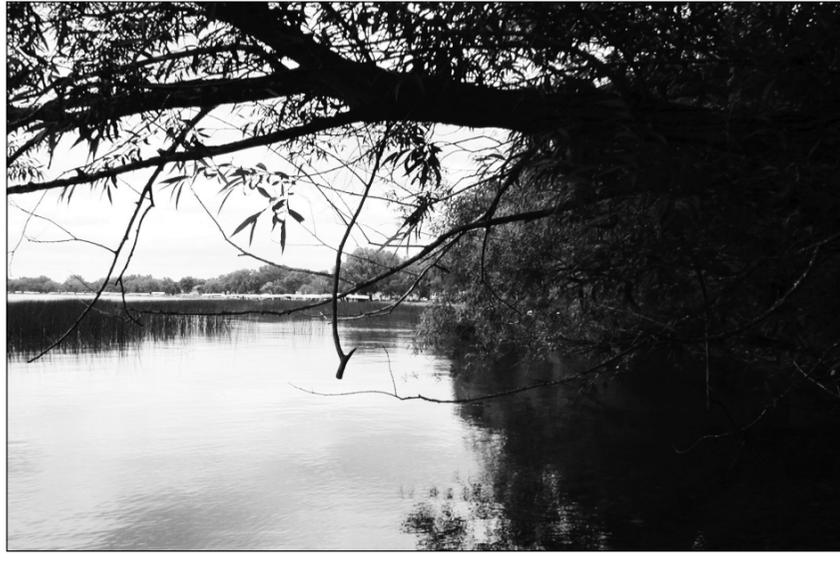
Not long ago, I wrote a story about trees and prairies and why trees are sometimes looked upon as invasive on tracts of restored tallgrass prairies. There is truly a place for trees and also a place where trees should not be allowed to grow. I relied on the expertise of Doug Harr, former head of the Iowa DNR's Wildlife Diversity Program and current President of the Iowa Audubon Society to help explain the situation.

Harr's initial statement is this, and it certainly makes sense: "Trees do belong in some places, and they certainly don't belong in others." He talked about fragmentation. "It is our responsibility to restore grasslands invaded by trees back to as pure a grassland/prairie as possible, and also to plant trees in areas of historic woodlands that have been cleared. Then the native wildlife and bird populations of each different habitat type are much more likely to thrive. It's a message we simply have to get out to all Iowans."

John H. Wills, Dickinson County Clean Water Alliance Coordinator, concurs with Harr. "While seeing trees removed may be unsettling at first," Wills said, "extensive scientific research and data support the longterm benefits to restoration of a natural habitat that once covered hundreds of thousands of acres in Iowa, but is not extremely rare."

## THE CONCERN FOR THE BULRUSH BEDS

Wills went on to explain that there is great concern



**This photo shows how far the bulrushes have receded from the shoreline. If this continues, we will lose this fragile system. Selective tree thinning and re-establishing the bur oak savanna system would help protect the bulrush beds.**

for one of the rarest natural habitats in Dickinson County: the bulrush beds in Anglers Bay on Big Spirit.

Remember the efforts in 2008 to save and protect the bulrush beds from being destroyed by human development? It was a great success, and I thought that was that.

It might be hard to believe, but the fragile bulrush beds are under attack again, this time by invasive trees and shrubs located on the shoreline. As a fisherman I have fished these bulrushes for nearly 40 years, and this kind of caught me off guard. I thought the shoreline was pretty much just the normal shoreline. Nope! We're talking about an invasion of non-traditional trees and shrubs into an area that was once a bur oak savannah.

According to Wills, "The savannah was historically here in the Iowa Great Lakes and throughout the area; these grasslands were dominated by large bur oak trees that once grew with little competition from neighboring trees."

As simple as it may seem, this savannah was a very complex system. Wills says, "This complex network of sun and shade patches created

by an over story of primarily open-grown oak trees led to an amazing diversity of grasses, sedges and flowering plants."

In their own way, this oak savannah protected the shoreline and the bulrushes. Wills explains the problem. "The existing invasive trees that currently crowd the shoreline of Spirit Lake are shading and slowly causing the bulrush bed to recede from the shoreline." There is also a second problem. "In addition, the invasive trees cause the shoreline to become unstable and could potentially cause a failure of the shoreline."

## PROTECTING THE BULRUSH BEDS

What to do? Wills says, "We have a great potential to help with the effort to restore the rare and native habitat called bur oak savannah. However, that project would require the removal of existing invasive trees that outcompete and shade out young oaks and native prairie understory."

"Tree thinning and ridding the invasive trees on Anglers Bay would be beneficial for the bulrush beds and

for the restoration of the bur oak savannah," Wills continued. "The weedy and invasive trees and shrubs will be selectively removed to restore an important and almost forgotten historical habitat that once bordered most of Iowa's natural lakes while, at the same time, protecting another of Iowa's most fragile and endangered systems: the bulrush beds."

At the same time, prescribed burns or fires would be used to reduce many of the invasive species that have invaded the historic bur oak savanna ecosystem. This would be effective because the bur oak savanna system has the ability to tolerate fire, which the invasive trees and shrubs do not.

Yes, some trees and shrubs will be destroyed. However, their destruction will mean the survival of a shoreline ecosystem that dates back hundreds of years. Iowans worked so hard to save the bulrush beds from human destruction in 2008.

I'd hate to see all that effort be for nothing and a few decades from now be saying, "Boy, I sure wish we would have" or "those bulrush beds were really something, weren't they?"

# Fish kill on Swan Lake

BY STEVE WEISMAN  
OUTDOOR EDITOR

I just received a release this past week of another lake in Iowa that experienced a substantial fish kill. Swan Lake located on the south edge of Carroll in Carroll County experienced a substantial fish kill in mid-August. About a month ago, Crystal Lake, which is located seven miles west of Forest City also experienced a substantial fish kill. In both instances, the fish kill was caused by a deadly blue-green algae bloom. Here is the DNR's release about

Swan Lake: DNR fisheries staff received reports of dead fish at Swan Lake on Saturday, Aug. 15 and arrived on scene that evening. They found thousands of dead fish along the shoreline, with the majority of fish concentrated along the northern part of the lake. Dead bluegill, crappie, largemouth bass, channel catfish, yellow bass and grass carp were observed.

"The fish kill appears to have been caused by a large diurnal swing in dissolved oxygen levels that dropped to lethal levels likely sometime

during the night or early morning hours," reported Ben Wallace, Iowa DNR fisheries biologist. "Dissolved oxygen levels in the top 2 to 3 feet of the water column were adequate for survival of fish, but then dropped to lethal levels below those depths." Swan Lake was experiencing a strong algae bloom, which can cause big swings in dissolved oxygen levels throughout a 24-hour period.

"The fish kill was pretty substantial and we lost a lot of our larger fish, which is also indicative of an oxygen

related fish kill," Wallace continued. "It's too soon to tell how the fishery has been impacted and what that means for the immediate future for Swan Lake."

"We hope that this event is over, but it is still possible that we could see more fish die from the stress of the event," Wallace said.

Natural kills from low dissolved oxygen levels are rarely complete and the fishery can recover fairly quickly. Fisheries staff will sample Swan Lake this fall to determine if additional stocking is needed

## FISHING THE MIDWEST

# Get ready for fall fishing

BY BOB JENSEN  
FISHING THE MIDWEST  
FISHING TEAM

It seems like summer just started, but it's already time to think about fall fishing. Nature has started providing us with the signs that remind us that autumn is closer than we think. Just like summer fishing is different in some ways than spring fishing, fishing in the fall can be different than fishing in the summer.

Some small changes in our presentation and location will help us catch more fish in the fall. Following are some ideas for catching more fish this autumn.

Location is always such an important consideration. We often think that fall fish will be in deeper water, and in some lakes and at some times they will be deep. But there are also times when they'll move shallow.

Lakes that have fall spawning baitfish such as tullibee and whitefish will see walleye, northern pike, and muskies in the shallows chasing and eating these fall spawners. They'll probably hang in the deeper water close to the spawning areas during the day, but at night when the spawning baitfish move shallow, so do the predators.

I've also had some memorable days catching largemouth bass in shallow reeds in the fall. Warm days are best, and the best reeds will be near deep water vegetation where the bass will spend much of their time, but bass that are shallow in the fall are often biters.

In the fall, most predator fish that are shallow will be biters. I'm reminded of an afternoon several years ago on Leech Lake in north central Minnesota. The report was that the bite was not real good. Most anglers were fishing the mid-depths, so that's where we started, along shoreline breaks in

eight to ten feet of water. The reports we had heard were right, action wasn't so good. The wind was blowing into the shoreline we were fishing, and we accidentally let it blow us in close to shore.

We made a couple of casts to the shallows with the eighth ounce minnow-tipped Fire-ball jigs that we had been using. Immediate hook-ups. We caught a couple more, then switched to sixteenth ounce Fire-balls that were more appropriate for the water that we were throwing to, which was two feet deep.

The walleyes didn't know they weren't supposed to be there, but they were. That afternoon was probably the fastest walleye action I've ever experienced. We would fish one point, catch a bunch of fish, then move to another shoreline that the wind was blowing into. As long as the wind was blowing into the shoreline, the walleyes were there.

Go with bigger baits in the fall. Maybe start with smaller stuff, but when you find the fish, show them larger baits and you'll catch larger fish. We use a lot of six inch suckers and the largest redbails we can find in the fall for walleyes and smallmouth. If you're after numbers of fish you might want to size down a bit, but not much. In the fall even smaller predators will take on a larger bait.

Keep in mind that for the past few months the fish have seen a lot of baits, and they will become conditioned to some baits. Try different bait or different colors or just anything a bit or a lot different and you'll often catch more fish.

Autumn is a great time to be outside. The weather is mild, the colors can be spectacular, and so can the fishing. Now is the time to start planning to take advantage of fall fishing.

# People advised to avoid water with blue-green algae

*Editor's note: Another story this week describes a fish kill at Swan Lake near Carroll, which was caused by an intense blue-green algae bloom. The following is a release from the Iowa DNR advising people to avoid water with blue-green algae. If concerned about the safety of your local lakes and streams, contact your local DNR office.*

With some Iowa waters showing signs of blue-green algae blooms, people and pets should avoid contact with water that has a poor appearance.

The appearance can be a pea-green or blue-green color, but also a reddish-brown. It may appear with scum, foam or as a thick mat on the water surface. Blue-green algae can grow quickly and become very abundant in warm, shallow, undisturbed surface water that receives a lot of sunlight.

"We recommend that if you are in an area where it's visibly showing masses of algae or a blue-green paint color, you should avoid contact with the water and keep pets away from it," said Mary Skopec who coordinates the beach monitoring program for the Iowa Department of Natural Resources.

Skopec said blue-green algae can release microcystins in the water that can make people and pets ill. "We don't want to scare people, as this is a naturally

occurring event. It happens every year in our lakes and rivers," Skopec said. "We just want people to be aware that if the microcystins are present, it can cause problems for people or pets."

The main risk to humans from microcystin is skin irritations and rashes, but if the water is swallowed or airborne droplets are inhaled during swimming, bathing or showering, symptoms could be worse. Those would include headaches, nausea, abdominal pain, seizures, liver injury and respiratory problems.

People can take the following precautions to prevent health-related problems due to harmful algal blooms:

- Don't swim, water ski or boat in areas where the water is discolored or if there is foam, scum or mats of algae on the water.
- If you come in contact with water that might have a harmful algal bloom, rinse off with fresh water as soon as possible.
- Don't let pets or livestock swim in or drink from areas where water is discolored, or if there is foam, scum or mats of algae on the water.
- Don't let pets (especially dogs) lick the algae off their fur after swimming in scummy water.
- Don't irrigate lawns or golf courses with pond water that looks scummy or has a bad odor.
- Don't drink the water. Boiling the water will not make it safe to drink.

## TIPS FOR STAND-UP PADDLEBOARDING

*Editor's Note: Every year there seems to be something new on the water. This year it is the stand-up paddling board (SUP). Just check out the bays of our Iowa Great Lakes, and you will see what I mean. They've taken the Iowa Great Lakes by storm. The Iowa DNR has compiled a list of tips and tricks from SUP instructor Todd Robertson on how to get your own adventure started.*

### TRY BEFORE YOU BUY

Many local retailers will schedule demo events where the public can try out assorted paddle boarding equipment and get basic instruction before purchasing a board of their own. Since boards come in all shapes and sizes and each handles differently, this is a great opportunity to make sure you get the best equipment for your skills, goals, and body type. Since the end of summer is approaching, look for end-of-season sales on boards and other gear to use next year.

### ASK THE EXPERTS

Once you have the board you want, you need to learn how to use it safely and efficiently. The best way to do this is to take lessons. Class and individual lessons are taught by multiple agencies and retailers throughout the state, but all professional instruction will help you stay safe and avoid frustration by working smarter, not harder. If you know a group that already

has access to a few boards and wants to try SUP, Todd Robertson can be contacted for group lessons at todd.robertson@dnriowa.gov.

### ESSENTIAL EQUIPMENT

It is imperative that a person participating in any sport have the proper gear and safety equipment. For SUP, this obviously includes a board, paddle and life jacket, but a board leash, quick-dry clothing and waterproof shoes are also recommended. The board leash is highly useful on lakes or other relatively still water. This strap tethers your board to your ankle or waist, making it easier to retrieve and get back on your board when you fall off. Board straps are not for use on rivers due to the hazards of current and debris. Robertson says no matter what water you paddle or what board you have, falling off a paddle board is much more likely than tipping a canoe or kayak because of the inherent higher center of gravity and reduced stability of standing up. Because of this, quick-drying clothes and shoes are recommended to keep you comfortable and protect your feet from debris.

### FLAT IS FUN

Particularly for novice paddlers, it's best to start on a relatively small, flat body of water like Gray's Lake or Lake Ahquabi. This experience will help you gain confidence and get the hang of paddle boarding with minimal difficulty and risk. Some lakes, like Ahquabi,

even have paddle boards available for visitors to rent. Check with the appropriate manager for hours and available equipment at different locations. Avoid larger bodies of water like Lake Red Rock or any river until you have significant experience and have been taught how to paddle on rougher water.

### MAKE A PLAN

When you have enough experience and confidence to take SUP trips alone, make sure you still have a plan and share it someone before you hit the water. They should know where you're going and how long you plan to be gone so they can check in with you or take appropriate actions if you're not back on schedule. While everyone should learn to paddle safely, avoid injury, and bring basic emergency gear, the simple prep step of telling someone your float plan could save your life in an emergency situation.

### GETTING TWISTY

If you want to spice up your paddle boarding experience, consider taking an SUP yoga class. While this can be a very tricky mix for paddlers who have trouble balancing, many people find it rewarding and enjoy the direct connection with nature while meditating. Different organizations and businesses offer these classes on different schedules and bases, so contact your local SUP source to ask about their available options.