

Brookings Wildlife Federation

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Affiliated with: South Dakota Wildlife Federation
National Wildlife Federation

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November 2009

November 6 Infolunch: Grassland Wilderness in South Dakota

The Brookings Wildlife Federation will host Ms. Heather Morijah, who will speak about the campaign for wilderness designation for public lands (U.S. Forest Service (USFS) National Grasslands) with names like Red Shirt, Indian Creek, and Chalk Hills. Heather is employed by the South Dakota Wildlife Federation (SDWF). She has been involved with the grassland campaign for many years as a member of the Sierra Club in the Black Hills.

Heather canceled her attendance at our July meeting, but now we'll hear the story of one of the SDWF's biggest programs. A coalition of groups, including the SDWF, has been pushing for a South Dakota National Grassland Heritage Act that would preserve approximately 50,000 acres of public land (8.4 percent of Buffalo Gap National Grassland or 5.8 percent of South Dakota's three national grasslands). Designating these areas as wilderness means protection from off-road vehicle abuse, oil and gas drilling, mining, and road building.

These windswept tablelands, sheer cliffs, stark buttes, and waving prairies are part of what makes our state unique and special. The upper photo shows Indian Creek in the Cheyenne River badlands; was recommended by USFS in their 2002 management plan for the Buffalo Gap National Grassland. The lower photo shows the colorful striped buttes adjacent to the Pine Ridge Reservation that give this area the name of Red Shirt.



Come to the HyVee club room on Friday, November 6, at noon to learn more about South Dakota grasslands' wilderness. Purchase lunch at the HyVee deli and bring your tray to the club room.

October Infolunch Review

The Brookings Wildlife Federation hosted Ms. Jacquie Ermer, who spoke about river otters. In South Dakota river otters are considered a threatened species. The river otter (*Lontra canadensis*) disappeared because of extensive trapping, habitat loss or degradation, and urban development long ago and has not been able to re-establish populations on its own. The Department of Game, Fish and Parks (GFP) does not plan to restore river otters in South Dakota, but has identified suitable habitat along the Big Sioux River. The Flandreau Santee Sioux Tribe has stocked some otters in the Big Sioux River.

Higgins Chases Roosters (by Chuck Berry)

Readers of this newsletter know that I have reported on the adventures of my black and white Springer spaniel named Higgins. I've cussed and discussed his habit of hunting pheasants some 50 yards or more in front of me; but this year he seems to be staying closer, especially when there is no bird scent in the grass where we are walking. I've got good news and bad news about the start of the 2009 season – here's the story.



The pheasant season started with that residents-only weekend on October 10 when hunting is only allowed on public land. One hunter said, "What's the use of walking the grass with all of that corn still standing?" Yea, but Higgins wanted to go and I was sure we needed the exercise. Maybe we could work on "our" his hunting skills.

Higgins was quartering back and forth in front of me and staying fairly close, but then he got on the edge of a cornfield and disappeared into the maize. I whistled till I was blue in the face, but Higgins was gone. A few minutes later I heard a "Yipe, Yipe," which means he's flushed birds. I wondered about the chances of a bird flying in my direction – probably one chance in 360 (degrees in a circle). Then I saw a pheasant flying high and fast. It was a great snap shot if I do say so myself. Maybe that bit of practice I had at the gun club this summer helped.

Oh sure, now that there was the sound of a gun, Higgins is right with me wondering what's going on. I pointed to where the bird fell and said "fetch." Higgins immediately began working to find the bird and he did. Man, those early roosters are really brown!

October 17 was the "real" opening day of the "magic season" (as Bob Roe likes to call it). At noon the skies were gray, but the weatherman said that we would see clearing in mid afternoon. The SDSU Jacks were playing NDSU that evening and Coach Stig said he would give me a pheasant from his freezer if I would stay home and go to the game. But Higgins wanted to get out there and start the season at 12 noon, so I decided to take my gun for a walk in the public grass for a couple of hours.

I like my old 16-gauge Ithaca pump featherweight shotgun. The *featherweight* part of the description is becoming more and more important to me! My brother Frank has the Ithaca that Dad bought for me to hunt ducks on the Chesapeake Bay when I was a kid. He paid \$22 dollars for it at Mr. Corbet's Sporting Good Store and Mr. Corbet added a box of shells to the deal. I remember that day well – a grownup gun! I found the same model Ithaca I used Saturday at the Brookings gun show a couple of years ago. The used gun is exactly the same as the gun of my youth, except the cost had increased to \$140.

It turns out that I didn't have to walk the grass for two hours because our birds got up within 25 yards of the truck. Here's the short story of opening day of magic season 2009.

As I loaded the Ithaca, Higgins was springing around the truck like – well, a Springer. He ran right past the first bird that flushed (I swear) from the grass about 30 feet from the truck. The bird flew low across a small water body, which is very instructional because I could see the shot hit the water behind the bird. However, some pellets must have connected because the bird glided to a splashdown at the edge of the marsh and disappeared into the thick grass. Higgins was immediately in the water swimming toward the spot. After some hyperactive sniffing and searching and crashing about in the cattails, out he came with a wet muddy bird. "Way to go Higgins!" The spurs on this bird were very short, which explains why it stayed nearby when I parked the truck. He was not a wise old long-spur who would have started running when he heard gravel crunching under the tires.

We walked for another hour and didn't flush any birds, so I decided to head for the barn and maybe stop by one other spot on the way home. "Very low probability of birds," I thought as I stopped the truck beside a huge rolling field of public grass, deep ponds, and trees – one of my favorite places to hunt because of the pleasing setting and an occasional bird.

History repeated itself as right away, not 25 yards from the truck, Higgins flushed a hen and then a rooster. The rooster crashed into the grass in a puff of feathers, but when Higgins got there the bird was gone. Nose to the ground in a frantic search, Higgins quickly figured out the trail and disappeared over the hill. Man, what a cool sight to see him come prancing back with that big colorful rooster in his face. It was another young dummy bird according to the spurs, but oh so beautifully colored. Wow! Three flushes and two birds in an hour – I wonder how those non-residents paying \$300 a gun are doing on their 15-bird limits. I did not hear much shooting.

We hunted for another hour without flushing anything. As usual, neither of us was paying much attention when the third rooster flushed. There is good news and bad news. The bad news is that Higgins got too far ahead of me – the bird was out of range. The good news is that the bird looked like old long-spur, the infamous mega-rooster who rules over this section of grass. I thought he was harvested last year, but apparently he lives. What a stud! Hens come from miles around just to – well, you know.

The rooster flushed straight up and cackled loudly at Higgins as he gained altitude. The green tree leaves in the background highlighted his brilliant colors. It took several seconds for his tail to clear the cover! And those spurs – the glint of sunlight from them was almost blinding.

Old long-spur has been smarter than Higgins and me in the past. Maybe this year we will corner him.

The clouds were breaking up in the west, two birds in the bag, Higgins was pooped, life is good. It was going to be a very nice evening for the football game.

New Fact Check Source (by Chuck Berry)

I need a lot of help with facts, which seem to be so elusive these days, and I have used factcheck.org to advantage. I have found two other resources that might help. The first is a spinoff of factcheck.org. It is called politifact.org. Politifact is sponsored by a newspaper in Florida so I wondered about its neutrality on issues, but it seems to be unbiased. You won't find much about hunting and fishing, but they do check up on environmental issues and gun control issues. Here are two recent findings.

- ❑ TV pundit repeated the “decade of cooling” myth and Politifact destroyed her with a great analysis, you've got to read it.
- ❑ They also checked a claim from Gun Owners of America that the Baucus health care bill could ban guns from homes. That one earned a False rating on their truth-o-meter.

We are faced with the awful practice used by special interest groups when they deliberately make statements that are “at variance with the truth” (a phrase I picked up in the Watergate era). We should be skeptical, but how would we know the aims of these institutes and coalitions and think tanks with high-sounding names – names often chosen to hide their real agenda (called a “front group” by PR agencies)? Well, we have help at two web sites. The first is a spin-off of factcheck.org called factcheckED.org. The “ED” is for “education” and you will see that this site is for teachers who are trying to help students be thoughtful citizens. This site lists many of these institutes and think tanks and front groups and rates them for reliability (click on “Straight from the Source”).

You can get the same service from sourcewatch.org, which also lists hundreds of people whose names show up in the news. I think it is a great help to know, for example, that the Oregon Institute of Science and Medicine (sounds important doesn't it) is run by a well-known contrarian scientist from his farmhouse “institute” near a small Oregon town. The board of directors is his family and he has been caught playing political tricks – nice web site though. Note: In their new book, *Trust Us, We're Experts: How Industry Manipulates Science and Gambles with Your Future*, S. Rampton and J. Stauber write about science for sale and manufacturing “independent experts.”

Where's the Global Warming? (by Chuck Berry)

This was the title of a letter to the *Brookings Register* recently. Kevin, the letter writer, noticed “South Dakota was green all the way to Rapid City.” He wrote that he recently heard that it has been cooler than normal for the last 11 years, so he asked “Where's the global warming?”

Why write about climate change in our fish and wildlife newsletter? Yawn! We've got information overload on this subject. Well, it's because we have a dog in the fight. Climate

change will affect many aspects of hunting and fishing as explained by the free booklet from the Wildlife Management Institute titled *Season's End* (www.seasonsends.org). The writers admit that their predictions about the changes that fish and wildlife populations and communities will undergo are speculative, but say that “there is too much risk not to take action now.” They suggest being conservative.

Back to the letter to the editor – I know enough to blow Kevin out of the water on his first observation. First, he confuses weather and climate (we have had rainy weather lately, but climate is a long-term condition); secondly, he confused South Dakota with “global” (the Governor tends to do this also). However, I could not really respond to his 11 year cooling trend claim except to say “look at the data from the IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change). Kevin might have said in response, “Well, you look at my data.” and the peeing match would start. I doubt that I would know enough about finding trends in climate data to respond, but thanks to a timely bit of news I have a response to this part of Kevin’s letter. Here’s the story.

An Associated Press reporter did an experiment that revealed the statistical trick used to claim global cooling. The reporter gave global temperature data to four statisticians without telling them what it was and asked them to look for trends. The result – the last 10 years are the warmest on record. Kevin had been tricked into believing a very biased way of analyzing the data. It is used by people who are trying to manufacture doubt about climate change. I do not know their motives, but now I know their trick. These people show a cooling trend by starting the trend line at 1998, an unusually warm year thanks to El Nino. Use any other year as a starting point, including 1997 and 1999, and the cooling trend disappears.

I am helping teach a class at SDSU that is reading a book titled *Hot, Flat, and Crowded* by T. Friedman. His premise is that the world is flat because the economic playing field has been leveled (is global) and it is crowded (population increasing rapidly) and unsettling things might happen when these two conditions meet “hot” (a changing climate).

The author urges us to break what President Bush called “our oil addiction.” The author told one story that sticks in my mind and I might be politically incorrect to recall it here, but hey I have a sticky mind. He reported on the thousands of Islamic schools (30,000 in Pakistan alone) that provided room, board, education, and clothing for boys while they learned a religious curriculum designed in 1707. The lessons were very anti-American – hate-filled really. The author of *Hot, Flat and Crowded* wrote that what he remembered most was a sign in English that said that the classroom was “a gift of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.” The author goes on to suggest that the transfer of USA wealth to oil countries is not in our best interest.

Note: Americans are becoming increasingly skeptical of climate change – about half trust the science and think that the earth is warming, according to a reputable poll. The other half thinks global warming is a hoax by scientists and liberals to get more control and bigger government.

Note: The Fish and Wildlife Service believes the science of global warming more and more. Actually they are not arguing the point any longer. They have rolled out a plan to help wildlife adapt to climate change by having their land managers make strategic landscape

conservation actions (think migration corridors for example). We will be hearing about LCCs (Landscape Conservation Cooperatives) for the next 50 years. You can learn a lot about what is going on and you can comment on their strategy by going to this address http://www.fws.gov/home/climatechange/strategic_plan.html.

Note: It might appear as you read on that I am attacking oil. I realize we need oil for 2 to 3 more decades to get to the clean energy stuff.

Note: Never mind that, what about us?! The new book titled *Crude World: the violent twilight of oil* (Peter Maass) is about the social costs of oil – meaning human rights, violence, and poverty. (Same subject as documentary film *Crude*, which is about Ecuador.) Maass toured the world to see how people’s lives are affected by the oil that they export. From the Niger Delta he writes, “I had to get permission from the warlord, because if I didn’t have his protection I’d be kidnapped in an instant. We took a canoe up the creeks and it was a terrible situation with wells dripping oil into the water, with flares all over the place, with fighting going on. I spent the night in one totally destitute village. It has no running water or electricity; it has no healthcare, nothing. Right across from the creek is a multi-billion dollar Shell natural gas processing facility, with massive flares. One of the reasons flaring is restricted in the United States is not simply because it emits a lot of greenhouse gases, but because it’s incredibly harmful to human health. The toxins and the chemicals that are emitted in flaring are tremendous. So for these villagers in the Niger Delta, the climate issue for them wasn’t that in 20 or 30 years the world temperatures will have increased by another degree and weather patterns will have changed slightly. The climate issue for them is that they were breathing toxic chemicals as a result of this flare that was 40 yards across the creek. At this particular facility, which is actually shut down due to fighting, there are massive flares going off 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Huge, huge flares. This is consistent throughout the Niger Delta.” (Editor’s note: this information about Shell makes me think of their TV ads about how green they are, yes sir, doing everything they can to help.)

Note: Shish! Lets go fishing!

Alaska Fishing Report

Former BWF member and fly fishing teacher and ornithologist Dr. Les Flake wrote the following report for our newsletter.

We again caught a lot of sockeye and a fair number of silvers. We hook up on about five silvers to every one we can land on a fly rod; our percentage landed is better on sockeye but a lot of those get off also as both species are really acrobatic and you have to use a 3/8 inch gap hook where we fish. It is not unusual to see the salmon clear the water on jumps. We catch everything on flies and try to avoid accidental snagging as much as possible. It is legal to snag and keep fish if hooked in the mouth. We saw a lot of illegal snagging and have not in four years seen any effort at enforcement of the complex laws at least on the rivers we have fished.

We fished only the Kenai and Russian Rivers this year and we saw plenty of pesky brown bears (a couple of black bears) but they do make nice photos and they keep you alert. One bear came off the bank and took away a fish the guy next to us was landing so I can say we saw a guy

with a brown bear on his fly rod. We all moved pretty fast to get out of the way on that one. One really enormous brown bear (silver tip type) was feeding just 40 yards from the camper one evening on the Kenai and walked just 15 yards from the camper on his way back to his hangout. We don't walk around much at night as the bears look friendly but we don't want one to get too close and give us a hug.

You have a hard time not catching the red sockeye as they seemed quite aggressive towards certain flies but we did very well on chrome colored sockeye in good eating condition. Almost all the silvers were in good eating condition with the chrome color although a few were starting to get some blush coloration.

If you want to fish Alaska in a motor home trip I can give you some good tips and a list of what you need to take. It is much cheaper than a lodge type trip with guides but the fish may not be as easy to get and it is more crowded.



GFP Commission Meeting, November 5-6, Pierre

The Commission will have a public hearing on the afternoon of November 5th at the Ramkota River Center to hear our opinions about a variety of regulation changes in fishing, hunting, and parks management. A quick scan of the agenda at their web site (<http://www.sdgfp.info/Commission/AgendaNov09.htm>) did not reveal any items relating to our area, except that they will suggest seasons for spring turkey and light goose.

I noted in the minutes of the October meeting held at Lemmon that SDWF Executive Secretary Chris Hesla attended the meeting and spoke in favor of five land acquisition opportunities – none in our area, but I did note the 240 acres along the James River near Yankton – the public needs more access to rivers in general.

The new Fisheries Program Administrator Geno Adams, an SDSU grad, spoke to the Commission about fishing regulations. He is trying to get more lakes on the same fishing regulations and, so far, the regulations for bass are the same in 16 lakes and for walleye are the same in 25 lakes.

Next up at the October Commission meeting was Tom Kirschenmann, also an SDSU grad who is the wildlife administrator. Tom had good news and bad news about pheasants – they are down 26% from last year, but their population estimate is the 4th highest ever. There is a draft pheasant management plan for us to review and comment on. Find it at <http://www.sdgfp.info/Wildlife/WildlifePlans/Pheasant/PheasantMgmtPlanDraft.pdf>. It takes 84 pages to call for more grass.

The “P” in GFP is for Parks and that side of the operation increased revenue 22% this year as 7 million people visited state parks. This is an increase of 7%. There is no news in the meeting minutes for parks in Brookings County. It’s no secret that Custer rivals any of the great national parks and Mary Lou and I spent some time there recently. Higgins went along also because Higgins wanted to hunt some mountain lions and buffalo, and chase the wild horses at the wild horse sanctuary. We didn’t see any lions, but two bison grazed on the lawn of our Custer Park Cabin. Higgins took a look at the bison and decided he would just continue harassment of the bunnies hiding under the porch. He did get a horse at the wild horse sanctuary (see photo).



SDWF and the State Technical Committee (STC)

This is just a reminder about the conservation activities that we sponsor through our membership in the SDWF, but usually go on under the radar. Our SDWF and GFP sponsored a one-day workshop for the STC, which is a broad coalition of volunteer people who try to advise Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and Farm Services Administration (FSA) with regards to the Federal Farm Bill and dollars spent for conservation and approved farming practices here in South Dakota. Chris Hesla, SDWF Executive Secretary, was a chief mover and shaker as he pulled the STC together on October 13 in Pierre. Officials from NRCS and SD Agriculture were there to hear about our conservation ideas. The National Wildlife Federation funded the workshop.

Ray Linder (1922-2009)

Ray was one of the fathers of the Brookings Wildlife Federation (Tom Yseth was the other father). In 1980, Ray brought the SDSU monthly wildlife meeting to the Ram Pub where Yseth was also holding a meeting and they combined the two to become the BWF. Ray was an instructor in wildlife when wildlife classes were part of the Entomology Department. He was the leader of the Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit from 1967-1985. After retirement in 1985, he held positions with the National Wildlife Federation and in other conservation groups. Ray mentored 66 SDSU graduate students and helped with their publications in science journals. It is hard to imagine these days, but his 1968 article titled “What is Ecology” [Conservation Digest 35(1):5-8] helped bring holistic thinking about wildlife and habitat into South Dakota’s management agencies. Ray had the foresight to begin work on prairie pothole wetlands in the 1980s before the others realized the need for a basin inventory of wetlands and an assessment of their functions and values. RIP.

“How do we harness the engines of commerce and the comforts of consumerism to the economy-class ideals of stewardship?”

Brookings Wildlife Federation

Celebrating 29 Years in Brookings

Affiliated with: National Wildlife Federation
South Dakota Wildlife Federation

Interests: Conservation, Hunting, Fishing

Activities: Kids Fishing
SDSU Scholarships
Information meetings
Newsletter
Conservation Camp
Guest Speakers
Seminars
State Policy Watch
Small Grants for Conservation

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