

FISHING



*forecast*  
2007

EARLY SPRING



MINNOW PHOTO BY JAKE ZWIBOHMER

# Get the minnows ready, Fishin's gonna be goood!

BY MICK KLEMESRUD PHOTOS BY CLAY SMITH  
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It's that itch that happens about the same time each year. You know the one. It usually starts with those sunny, March days when you find yourself in the garage staring at your empty fish basket hanging in the corner. You wish for May and some easy fishing.

Hey, while you're standing there, your friends are enjoying the weather, the water and the fishing you're only dreaming about. Yes, you read



NORTHERN PIKE



CHANNEL CATFISH

## MARCH

right. Fish will bite in March. Some of the easiest—and best—fishing all year is for channel catfish after ice melt.

“If I could ever guarantee a time people can catch fish, that would be the time,” says Lannie Miller, a fisheries biologist with the DNR.

**CATFISH** gorge on fish that died during the winter. As the ice goes out, dead fish blow in to shore, with hungry catfish in tow. Catfish hammer dead shad or cut bait, like chunks of bait fish or small panfish, near the shoreline facing into the wind in less than 5 feet of water. This technique is used across Iowa.

*The Coralville Reservoir around the I-380 bridge* offers stringers of mostly 2- to 4-pound catfish, with some up to 10 pounds. At *Lake Rathbun*, all sizes of catfish are available. “Rathbun is an exceptional catfish fishery,” says fisheries biologist Mark Flammang.

Fish the upper end of *Lake Icaria* and *Little River*, the shallow areas at *Green Valley* and *Binder Reservoir* for 2- to 3-pound catfish. *Storm Lake* rolls and boils from the catfish frenzy, too. The same phenomenon plays out every spring in the *Mississippi River* backwaters and in the upper pools, where **NORTHERN PIKE** and even **BLUEGILLS** will also join the buffet.

As northern Iowa lakes open up, **WALLEYES** at *Clear Lake* move to rocky shorelines preparing to spawn. “We are riding a really good walleye population right now,” says Jim Wahl, fisheries biologist. Wade-in fishing is the preferred method. Cast a jig and a minnow along the east shoreline near the outlet, the *Island and Dodges Point/Methodist camp*. “Now is the opportunity for the person without the big boat,” Wahl says.

*Silver Lake*, at *Lake Park*, is another wade-in walleye fishery. Fish a jig and minnow on the north side of the

lake or on the south side around the island. At *Lake Sugema*, try the face of the dam and the points in the lower half at dusk with a crankbait or minnow under a bobber. Sugema has a lot of 14- to 19-inch fish, plus trophy size walleyes, and spring is when they are caught.

Ice-out walleye fishing is excellent in the *East Fork of the Des Moines River at Algona* and the *Iowa River between Alden and Iowa Falls*. In the *Mississippi River* tailwaters of pools 15 and 17, walleyes hit jigs and minnows in areas with current.

**SAUGERS** run below *Mississippi River* dams in mid-March. Target water 20 to 35 feet deep with a jig and minnow or a three-way swivel with weight and minnow on the ends.



BLUEGILL



WALLEYE



BULLHEAD

SAUGER



Keep the bait just off the bottom and fish areas with sand, and jig up and down. Mastering the drift is the key to success. Saugers of all sizes up to 19 inches are available.

Fishing is closed in the tail-waters below *Dubuque, Bellevue and Clinton* until March 16. When it opens, anglers use a jig and minnow or a three-way with either a spinner, floating jig or plain hook tipped with a minnow. There is decent below-dam shore access below Dubuque.

**BULLHEAD** fishing at *Rice Lake* is excellent for 3/4-pound fish. Rice Lake is shallow and warms quickly. The technique is simple: bait a hook and sinker with a night crawler and fish the bottom along windy shorelines on warm days.

Not to be outdone, **LARGEMOUTH BASS**—yes, largemouth bass—fishing at *Prairie Rose* is excellent using rubber worms and a slow retrieve. Largemouth bass also are on the move at *Lake Miami*. Toss a jig and pig (a leaded jig with a pork trailer) just under the surface in the standing timber for bass up to 8 pounds. The best fishing is during consistent weather that is trending warmer.

## APRIL

Through mid-April, **CHANNEL CATFISH** at *Lake Darling* continue biting on cut bait. The best fishing is on sunny days in the shallow bays. Channel catfish are also active in the *Missouri River*. Fish the scour holes on the downstream sides of wing dikes with stink bait, cut bait, liver, or shad guts. There are channel catfish of all sizes in



## APRIL

(CONTINUED)

the Missouri River and this technique works as long as there is open water.

**TROUT** hatcheries begin stocking streams weekly on April 1. Streams with easy access are *Baileys Ford, Richmond Springs and the Turkey River at Big Spring*. Trout streams in the Decorah area experience a mayfly and caddisfly hatch, making this a great time to fly-fish trout. *French Creek* and *North Bear* have consistent hatches as well as naturally reproducing **WILD BROWN TROUT**.

Walleye fishing picks up as “ol’ marble-eyes” prepare to spawn. **RIVER WALLEYES** move upstream and gather below low-head dams. In the *Wapsipinicon River*, use a jig and minnow below the dams in *Anamosa, Central City and Troy Mills*. At *Clear Lake* and *Storm Lake*, wade-in anglers will be looking for traditional spawning areas and hammering the male walleyes in the evening. At *Storm Lake*, fish the east shore, north of the boat ramp. On the north side, fish the rocky west side of *Chautauqua jetty*. Use a 1/8-ounce white or chartreuse twister (with gold or silver flecks) tipped with a minnow and fish in water less than two feet deep.

Walleyes also are stacked at the dam on *Three Mile Lake* and *Little River*. *Lake Icaria* has a good number of 2-pound walleyes and lots of younger fish coming on after a lake renovation project three years ago. At *Lake Manawa*, fish the south shore with a chartreuse jig tipped with a minnow. Manawa has good numbers of bucket-busting walleyes exceeding 20 inches.

**MUSKIE** fishing at *Three Mile Lake* takes off in mid-April. Fish the outside edge of the weed lines or fallen timber bordering shallow water using larger bass-type crankbaits and spinner baits and fish aggressively. There is a nice population of 35- to 45-inch muskies.



MUSKIE

SMALLMOUTH BASS



Warm April days mean **SMALLMOUTH BASS** get active around the rock piles at *Spirit Lake*. The best bait is a jig and a minnow. “You can spook them, so you want to know your areas and cast in to them,” says biologist Jim Christianson. Those areas are *Stoney Point, Reeds Run, Red Nose and Little Stoney Point*, all on the east side of the lake. At *East Okoboji Lake*, **CHANNEL CATFISH** fishing is excellent north of the narrows on cut bait for a huge population of fish from 2 ½ to 5 pounds. At nearby *Lost Island Lake*, **CRAPPIES** bite before the spawn. Fish in less than 2 feet of water with a jig and minnow for dandies 10 to 12 inches long.

Fishing is really good for 10- to 12-inch **BULLHEADS** at *North Twin Lake*. Use a 1/8-ounce lead-head or a slip sinker and hook tipped with a night crawler and fish in *Muddy Bay* where the creek enters the lake or at *Featherstone Park*.

In late April, **CRAPPIES** become active. These prespawn crappies will not be right on shore, but out in 10 to 12 feet of water. Use jigs tipped with minnows floated under a bobber. This tactic works on a number of lakes including *Lake Delhi, Martens Lake [Sweet Marsh], and Meyers Lake, near Evansdale*. Lakes in *Adair County* are full of 9- to 12-inch crappies. Use red and white, chartreuse or yellow tube jigs along rocks or woody structure near shore. *DeSoto Bend* has an excellent population of large crappies and the best fishing is on the southeast corner of the lake, near woody debris. Don’t overlook the lagoon area at *Lake Manawa*.

At the same time, **WALLEYES** are active at *Lake Macbride*. The key is to still fish the rock reefs with a jig and minnow or a night crawler on a harness. Walleyes range from 14 to 18 inches. 🐟



LARGEMOUTH BASS



BROWN TROUT



WHITE CRAPPIE



### LEARN MORE

*New to fishing? Don't understand something in this article? Check your local bait shop for assistance. Nearly 400 are listed at [www.iowadnr.gov](http://www.iowadnr.gov) under bait dealers on our fishing pages.*



### TAKING OUT THE TRASH

Name any lake or river in Iowa, and chances are unsightly bait containers, sacks, pop and beer cans, old fishing line, candy bar wrappers and broken equipment dot the shores and float the waters.

"We are our own worst enemy when it comes to littering," says Marion Conover, chief of the DNR's fisheries bureau. "We anglers need to do a better job of being good stewards of the resource and to pick up after ourselves."

Anglers looking to pass along the fishing tradition should include a lesson in fishing etiquette:

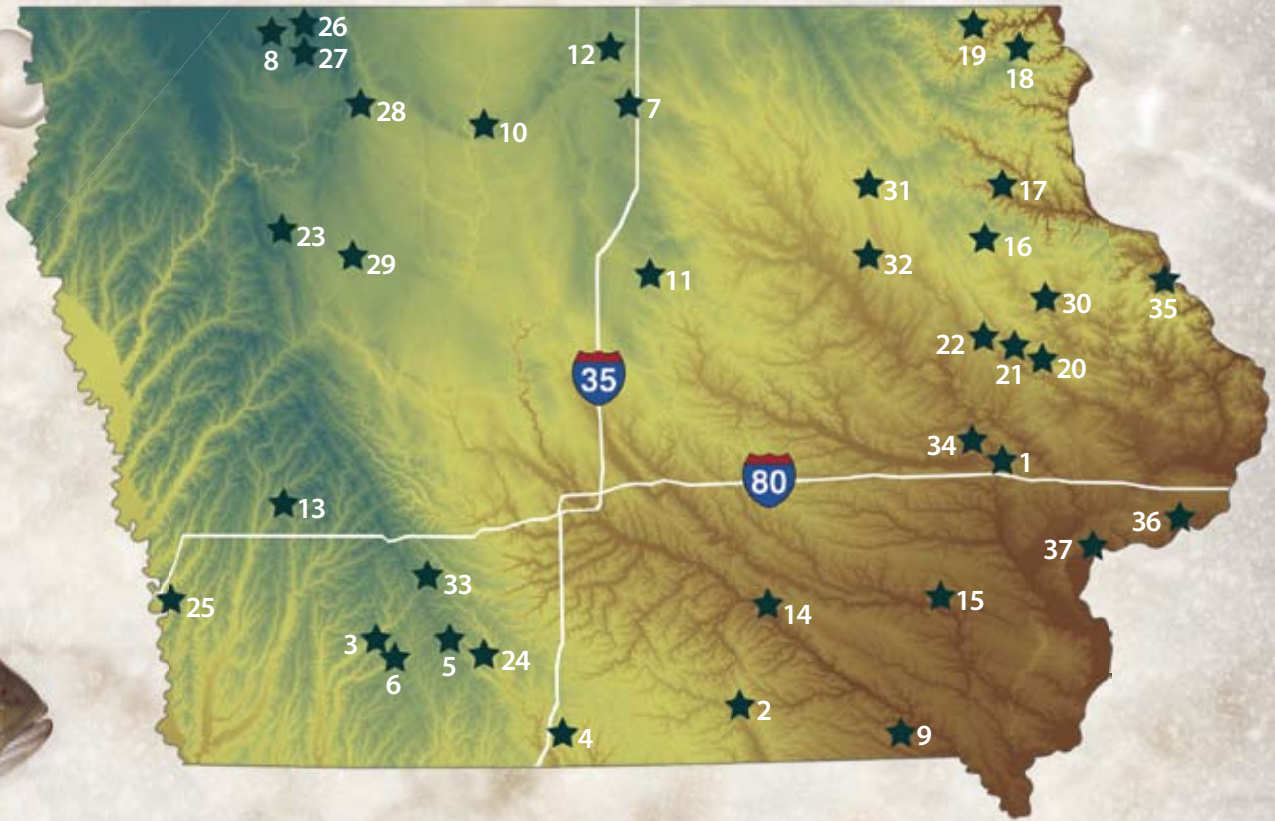
- **Treat fellow anglers with respect.**
- **Leave no trash behind. Pick up trash you find, even if it isn't yours.**
- **Obey all fishing laws.**
- **Be respectful of the resource and only keep fish you plan to eat.**
- **If you don't keep the fish, promptly land it and return it to the water.**
- **Don't crowd other anglers. If fishing from a boat, give room to shoreline anglers.**
- **Boat anglers should consider others on the water and not boat too close, or pass anglers at a high rate of speed.**
- **Sound travels well over water. Keep radio, phone and other conversations at a low level.**

Anglers are judged by the actions of a few. Be a good steward of the resource, and demand others to practice good fishing etiquette as well.

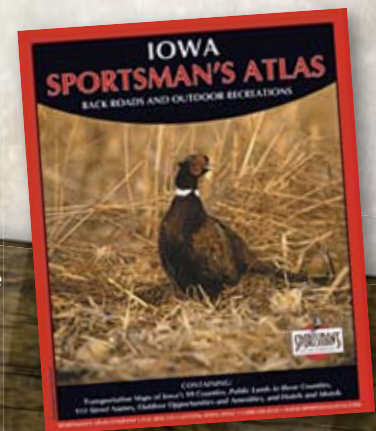
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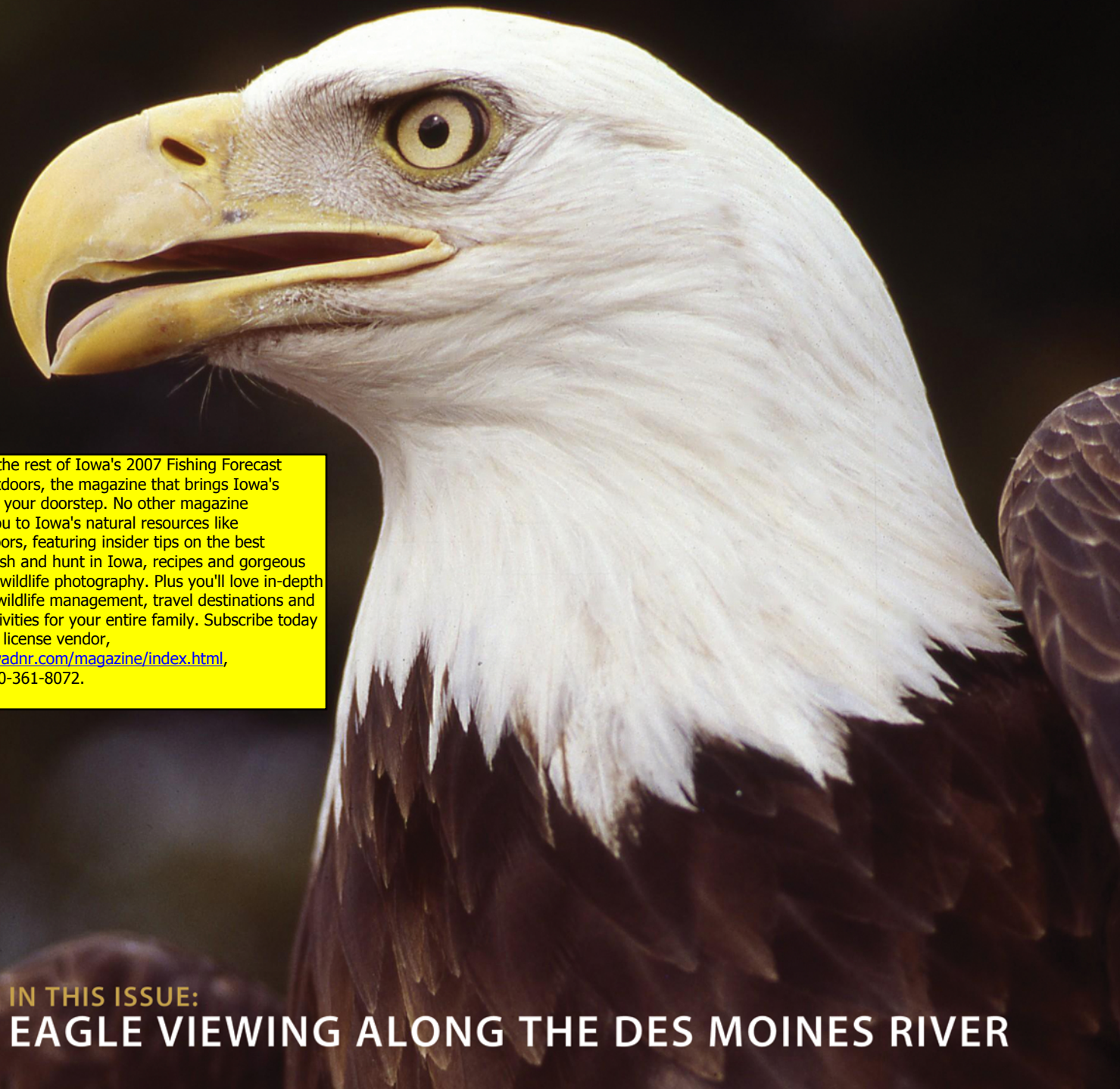
- |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| 1) CORALVILLE RESERVOIR                                       | 13) PRAIRIE ROSE                          | 28) LOST ISLAND LAKE                      |
| 2) LAKE RATHBUN   | 14) LAKE MIAMI                            | 29) NORTH TWIN LAKE                       |
| 3) LAKE ICARIA  | 15) LAKE DARLING                          | 30) LAKE DELHI                            |
| 4) LITTLE RIVER   | 16) RICHMOND SPRINGS                      | 31) MARTENS LAKE                          |
| 5) GREEN VALLEY   | 17) TURKEY RIVER,<br><i>at Big Spring</i> | 32) MEYERS LAKE,<br><i>near Evansdale</i> |
| 6) BINDER RESERVOIR   | 18) FRENCH CREEK                          | 33) ADAIR COUNTY                          |
| 7) CLEAR LAKE   | 19) NORTH BEAR                            | 34) LAKE MACBRIDE                         |
| 8) SILVER LAKE,<br><i>at Lake Park</i>                        | 20) ANAMOSA                               | 35) DUBUQUE                               |
| 9) LAKE SUGEMA  | 21) CENTRAL CITY                          | 36) DAVENPORT, <i>Pool 15</i>             |
| 10) EAST FORK OF THE<br>DES MOINES RIVER,<br><i>at Algona</i> | 22) TROY MILLS                            | 37) MUSCATINE, <i>Pool 17</i>             |
| 11) IOWA RIVER, <i>between<br/>Alden and Iowa Falls</i>       | 23) STORM LAKE                            |   |
| 12) RICE LAKE   | 24) THREE MILE LAKE                       |   |
|   | 25) LAKE MANAWA                           |   |
|   | 26) SPIRIT LAKE                           |   |
|   | 27) EAST OKOBOJI LAKE                     |   |



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