

Northwestern Ontario

FREE

Outdoors



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OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE NORTHWESTERN ONTARIO SPORTSMEN'S ALLIANCE



**NORTHWESTERN ONTARIO
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Shauna Lowe
landed this beast of
a walleye using the
Kamooki Smartfish



Iced Walleyes with the Kamooki Smartfish

By Shauna Lowe

Walleye fishing on the hard water! It's my passion! There's nothing like a flaming sunrise followed by the action of a "hot bite" of voraciously feeding walleyes. When ice fishing for walleye my favorite and most successful time is the morning bite! The morning walleye bite is like someone flipped a magic switch that's triggered right at sunrise. I'm ready to go and I know if there are fish in the area they will start biting. To be on the ice and ready for that magical sunrise moment, my ice fishing adventures start no later than 4:00 am.

Set up time is critical and the timing of loading gear, travel time, unloading gear, drilling holes, Eskimo shack set up, and getting my rods in the water on time plays an important role. I like to have 2 holes drilled and I set up each hole differently. You can never be sure what the walleye will want or the presentation they are looking for, so each hole is to test if the bite will be a light soft bite or an aggressive one.

Each day seems to be different and I haven't figured out a method to this madness. My first hole is set up as a dead stick. The dead stick consists of a flasher jig and a live minnow sitting 2-3" off the bottom. Using my Hummingbird 45 Ice flasher I'll set up my jig precisely where I want it before moving the flasher to my second hole. The rod will sit in a rod holder and I will keep a close eye on the sensitive rod tip watching for any light walleye bite.

My second hole is rigged with my "go to" lure the Kamooki Smart Fish and my Hummingbird 45 to watch the activity of the fish coming in and where my lure is sitting in the water column. The Hummingbird is a very important tool in telling me what the fish will want.

The choice of my Kamooki SmartFish pattern is dictated by the weather forecast for the day. If the day is sunny the colorful baits such as the blue shad, or green tiger seem to work best. On cloudy days the shiny baits such as the walleye or perch pattern will provide the right amount of reflection to attract fish. The shiny patterns seem to capture any available light in the water to attract the walleye. The glow tiger pattern is exceptional on any day regardless of the forecast along with the night bite.

By dropping my SmartFish down the hole and hitting the bottom and tapping a few times to stir things up, the goal is to attract fish to the disturbance. By "ripping" the lure up through the water column then slowly let it fall to the bottom, it provides a presentation that is enticing to hungry walleyes. When the bait is ripped up it causes a unique rattle and vibration to telegraph its location throughout the water which is especially alluring to walleye. I use this technique to "call them in". While the bait is slowly falling to the bottom its important to carefully watch the Hummingbird to see if any fish have come into the column.

While all this is going on, it's also very important to watch the dead stick. If the fish want a slow presentation they may come in from the rattle and vibrations but only hit the dead stick. I will only rip the SmartFish 2-3 times before placement close to the bottom. Once the rattle and vibration is sent out I leave my lure 2-3" off the bottom.

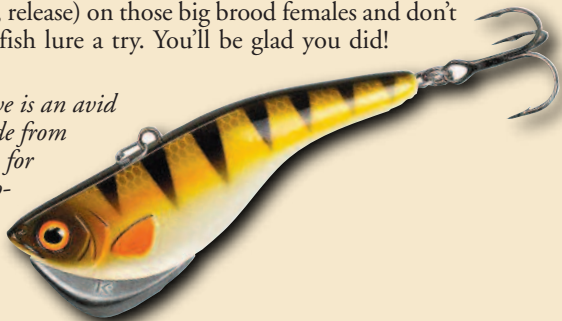
At this point I'm still unaware of what the fish want so aggressively ripping this bait over and over could turn out to scare them away rather than get them to bite. With the Kamooki SmartFish now in place and close to the bottom and if no fish have appeared on my Hummingbird, I will then vertically jig slowly and keep close to the bottom. If an aggressive fish comes in it will usually smash the bait on the drop.

When a less aggressive fish comes in on screen and moves close to the bait I will raise the bait slowly while I watch on my flasher to see if the fish chases upwards in pursuit of the lure. There is no telling how far up the fish will chase it so the only thing to do is prepare for the hit and watch the end of your rod curl while feeling the weight and immediately set the hook! I have also had a walleye chase the lure up 4-6 feet and then swim away. When this happens I'll immediately drop the bait back down and leave it 2-3" off the bottom as a dead stick presentation. Surprisingly enough the fish will often then come back and smash the bait, therefore revealing that they want a more subtle presentation.

I have been very successful at catching walleye through the ice with the Kamooki Smartfish. It's definitely my "go to" lure when I hit the ice for Walleye. Even on a slow day when the walleye's are tight to the bottom and only wanting a slow or a dead stick presentation the SmartFish has still been useful to me "calling them in" or sending out the unique rattle and vibration to let them know there is a meal nearby.

Mid winter walleye hunting through the ice is not for the timid! If you're prepared to brave the cold temps in order to chase these hungry fish, then you'll often be rewarded with great angling action and a great tasting meal of some of the best eating fish on the planet. Practice CPR (catch, photo, release) on those big brood females and don't forget to give the Kamooki Smartfish lure a try. You'll be glad you did! Good luck!

About the author: Shauna Lowe is an avid bow hunter, sport angler and guide from Manitoba as well as field staff rep for Kamooki Lures. Shauna proudly promotes youth and women's sport angling events. Reach her at: shaunaloweoutdoors@gmail.com or find her on her face book page



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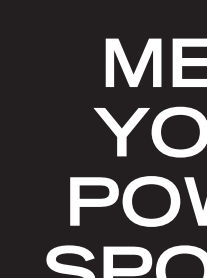
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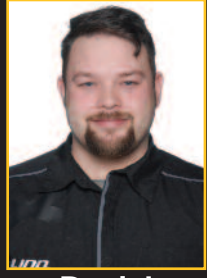
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Samantha Boyce lands a lunger laker at Brown's Clearwater



Ice Fishing Paradise

Clearwater West and White Otter Lake

By Samantha Boyce, Team NOSA Member

If you love ice fishing & especially big Lake Trout and you're up for an adventure, read up as I guarantee you will want to make this trip!

For the past 4 years, we've made the trip up to Browns Clearwater West Lodge; a half hour from Atikokan, Ontario. Each year with the hopes of reeling up that big talked about lake trout lurking in these waters! Browns Clearwater West Lodge is located on Clearwater West Lake which is adjoined to White Otter Lake by a short portage. It is owned & run by Barry & Carol Brown. They offer several comfortable cottages, portage-to & fly-in outposts. All very well equipped for the angling adventurer.

What keeps us coming back each year you ask? Well here are the facts; first, this destination holds two Freshwater Fishing Hall of Fame world records. Clearwater West is home to the ice fishing world record for a "kept" freshwater Lake Trout by Earl Palmquist in 1987; it weighed in the scales at exactly 40lbs. White Otter Lake is home to the ice fishing world record for a "catch & release" freshwater Lake Trout by Bruce Soderburg in 2013. Although he didn't have anything to weigh this fish, they measured it on the ice and took photos beside the Lake Trout for proof. This Laker was 46 inches and likely weighed over 40lbs.

Most of the fisherman we've come across over the years in this area have had their hands on a Lake Trout in the 20-40lb mark with the majority of the fish being caught in the winter months. There is a healthy population of big Lake Trout in these waters. If you take a look at the wall at Browns Lodge office, you'll catch a glimpse of the many tales and photos of fisherman and their big Lake Trout catches over the years; proving and supporting the fact of just how spectacular the Lake Trout fishing here really is.

White Otter Lake also holds an abundance of Walleye if you know where to find them. Just as the Lake Trout are big in this lake, so are the walleye. The walleye here will really surprise you. A lot of the time you will find them in the same area that you find the Lake Trout. One year we were set up to fish for Lake Trout in about 60 feet of water. I marked a fish on the bottom of the vexilar; assuming it was a Lake Trout. This fish aggressively hit my jigfly, and took a few good long runs under the ice before I got it through the hole. To my surprise it was a gorgeous Walleye. He had to have weighed between 8-9lbs. It was released and back on her way.

So if you've made it this far, you cannot come to this place and not visit famous White Otter Castle. Visited by hundreds of people each year, the castle is so remote that the only way to get to it is by snow machine, plane, or boat in the summer. Its an elaborate 3 story high log home built solo by Jimmy McQuat in 1903. He spent 15 years living off the land here, before accidentally drowned in his own fishing net in 1918. He was buried in front of his castle, where the grave still remains today.

This is truly a remarkable story and sight to see. I make a point of visiting it each time were there.

Looking at a map of Clearwater & White Otter Lake, you'll see the endless possibilities to fish the surrounding lakes. Some of these lakes hold lake trout, whitefish, walleye, and brook trout. There are always plenty of options to explore and fish many other lakes in the area. Although I haven't had my hands on a double digit Lake Trout, I have many good reasons to keep me coming back to try.

If you make this trip, it might become your favourite destination too. I hope you get the chance to visit this place as it is truly a paradise for the adventurous ice fisherman.



*Landan Brochu
makes bunny
hunting look easy!*

Rabbits = Winter Hunting Fun and Table Fare

By Landan Brochu, NOSA Member

December marks the end of most hunter's treks into the great white north, with the intent to harvest game species. Deer and moose hunting finish their course on the 15th, with grouse following not far behind on the 31st. Firearms are cleaned and placed in their lockers for the season's hibernation, while augers and sleds are awakened for regular use on the now frigid landscape. Ice fishing traditionally becomes an avid outdoorsmen's general focus, however there is yet another hunting opportunity that can offer excitement, challenge and excellent table fair throughout the long cold months to follow. Varying hares are a species often overlooked by most seasonal hunters. But once the riddle of how to effectively hunt these rabbits is solved, they can almost be as addictive as the drop tine bruisers on your trail cam pics from the early fall!

Rabbit numbers across Northern Ontario are usually quite plentiful, especially within the District of Thunder Bay. Any back road, or property trail should reveal a bounty of well frequented highway trails. "High way trails" would be defined as the main routes of travel that multiple rabbits frequent throughout the night to occupy food sources, and daytime beds. This is a key finding in step one of stalking these wary creatures. A general rule to remember is if you find the trails, you'll find the rabbits. During the early dawn, rabbits will find a safe location where they reside for the entirety of the day. Most rabbits will lay in these beds until dusk, so a sharp eye and a slow pace must be initiated to differentiate the slightest abnormalities. The main defining feature which compromises their snowy disguise, is no larger than a pea. The black speck of their eye is enough trigger your instincts into knowing something is different than the other low hanging piles of snow you viewed earlier. Rabbits are nocturnal and rarely travel during daytime hours.

During the afternoon, rabbits will be discovered in sapling patches, or beside large coniferous trees. I've also had great luck finding them hidden beneath large dead fall and amongst snow domed alder bushes. When you approach a fallen tree or slash pile, be sure to give it a kick, sometimes coaxing is required to get them to dart out. If you are walking within an area composed of mostly poplar and alder bushes, be sure to study any collection of young pine growth or thick alder patches within them, these will usually hold rabbits. Varying hares also enjoy locations with great vantage points. They will usually bed in areas where they have greater control of their surroundings. If there is a hill in the area, I usually find rabbits at the top. This allows them to scan the view down below for incoming predators. As well, they will lay on the slope where the sun may warm them for the entirety of the day. If a rabbit is pushed out of its bed, they most likely will return to the same location within the hour. These spots are always worth a second look.

The choice of what to use when hunting rabbits is based of personal preference, although, most people will depend on the reliability of a 12 or 20 gauge. These have proven to be the ultimate northern brush pushing gauges in my experience. Pairing this up with Imperial ammunition in shot size #4, #5, #6 is ultimately ideal. If you are looking for a greater challenge, packing a .410, .22 or bow can take the experience to an entirely new level! Varying hares in Ontario have always been the baseline food source for all predation within the boreal forest. This winter, try something new and challenging! It just could become the alternative outdoor winter hunting adventure you were looking for. Plus, they offer great table fare! Enjoy!

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THIS MONTH'S NEWS

Black Sturgeon Dam Proposal

By John Hay, NOSA Director



The next step of what seems like an endless bureaucratic process is underway in the conservation effort for the Black Sturgeon River and ultimately Black Bay on Lake Superior. Those next steps include the Environmental Assessment pieces prescribed by law in the Province of Ontario. For this particular project that process includes not only the Ministry of Environment assessment policies but an additional assessment because the proposed activities required to rehabilitate are on lands and waterways designated as Parks.

It is the position of the Northwestern Ontario Sportsmen's Alliance(NOSA) and your representatives on FMZ 9 and FMZ 6 that the preferred option to achieve the goal of walleye rehabilitation to sustainable population levels or historic levels in Black Bay is to remove existing dam at camp 43 and build a lamprey control structure on the Black Sturgeon River at the location of Camp 1.

This is consistent with the preferred option recommendation put forward by FMZ 9 previously. That preferred option was subsequently endorsed by FMZ 6. It should be noted that the Black Sturgeon River and in particular portions of the river affected by any of the options considered by FMZ 9 and this Strategic Decision Making process are in an area defined to be part of FMZ 6. That was why the opinion and recommendation of FMZ 6 was considered pertinent and valuable.

Much of the discussion with respect to the options put forward was similar or a repeat of positions and information that were presented to or debated by FMZ 9. The most significant difference between FMZ 9 and the Strategic Decision Making process was the inclusion of the Great Lakes Fisheries Commission including international representation (from United States).

There was also a greater presence from lamprey control interests. This included some of the same representation that participated in FMZ 9 discussions prior. The workshops were provided substantial documentation and valuable professional opinion on many areas of lamprey control including history, control options, control targets, efficacy, modeling and estimated consequences of the considered options. Also included were estimates on costs for the considered options.

The costs presented indicate that for the preferred option described above to be only \$150,000/ 4 years. While understanding it is an increase, based on the existing budget for lamprey control, it is a reasonable and justifiable increase. It is also recommended by NOSA that consideration be given to enhancing data collection on the lamprey population in the affected watershed. Apart from the existing lamprey control methods employed now we believe the DFO and the GLFC should investigate the possibility of harvest and commercialization of lamprey as marketable fishery resource.

The creation of potentially ~ 400 square km's of spawning habitat increase has been accepted as the best opportunity to allow walleye rehabilitation to reach sustainable population levels or historic levels. FMZ 9 and the SDM workshops had thorough discussions on walleye populations, habitat, and growth. While much of the FMZ 9 work was repeated, with new representatives available at the workshops there was opportunity for broader participation and additional information. The additional walleye information and related habitat science did not encourage another reasonable option for the attaining the goal of walleye rehabilitation in Black Bay. The additional scrutiny confirmed the preferred recommendation.

FMZ 9 was thorough with its inclusion of the other values of a rehabilitated and sustainable walleye population, including the positive recreational, consumptive and economic aspects of a vital and biologically diverse Black Bay. It should be noted that while comments provided in the discussion were pointed at walleye rehabilitation, the preferred option of the removal of the dam and construction of a lamprey control barrier at Camp 1 has positive habitat potential for other species. For example Lake Sturgeon will also benefit from increased access to the Black Sturgeon watershed as will other important species.

It is recognized that changes to the watershed will impact all species and there was much discussion around this. That important information was considered in making the recommendation put forward by NOSA and ultimately becoming the preferred option subject to current environmental assessments out for public comment. Access to those opportunities for public comment can be found at the Environmental Registry website at www.ebr.gov.on.ca and in the search engine simply type in the EBR#012-9197 for a full listing of background information and environmental impact status. Comments may be submitted to this posting up until March 10, 2017.

In conclusion it is the recommendation of the Northwestern Ontario Sportsmen's Alliance and its representatives, that the Government of Ontario move forward with the next steps to remove the existing dam and construct a lamprey control structure at Camp1. Also sources of funding need to be identified for the project. There should also be a stakeholder steering committee to act in an advisory capacity on Black Bay/ Black Sturgeon fishery for the creation of a specific fish management plan. This would include mechanisms and agreements to ensure long range planning and data collection is sustained.

There has been a significant amount of time has elapsed since the project was first considered by FMZ 9 and it appears there will be some more time before the construction and demolition. An environmental assessment can be a protracted event. There are still many potential roadblocks including special interests groups, diverging viewpoints within and outside of Senior Levels of Government that were evident and are still simmering. But we did enjoy support of successive Provincial governments, OMNRF Ministers (including MPP Bill Mauro in his time as the Minister) and changing administrations within the local OMNRF.

It should also be noted the all the efforts and time spent by the representative members of FMZ 9 and FMZ 6 were invaluable in getting the project to this step, that most certainly would include the continuing stewardship of Dave Nuttall, Stakeholder Co-Chair for FMZ 9.

The project is also so significant that consideration should be given to identifying the Black Sturgeon River rehabilitation project for additional special status in keeping with the evolving mandates for FMZ 6 and FMZ 9. Please take the opportunity to make your views known on this conservation initiative.



THIS MONTH'S NEWS

Shuniah Dump Opposition Builds

By Derek Parks, NOSA Member

A proposal by the Municipality of Shuniah to convert an existing wood chip landfill to a household waste landfill has the potential to put the Current River at risk of severe environmental pollution entering the water and destroying Brook Trout fisheries on the North Current River and Penassen Creek.

A unique situation has arisen in that under current government regulations, a public environmental assessment is NOT required, as the site has a current Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change approval to be a landfill...for Wood Waste. An Environmental Screening Report is currently being completed by the Municipality of Shuniah to convert this Wood chip landfill into a Household Waste (Non Hazardous) landfill. Timelines to complete this report are extremely compressed and lack any type of transparency for the public to provide substantive comments on the data (and lack thereof) being presented.

A public information center (PIC) was held on January 25th, 2017 at the MacGregor Recreation Centre. The information presented outlined the Environmental Screening Process and expected timelines. Comments from the first PIC were due by February 3rd. Then the timelines permit for two weeks to conduct studies and develop mitigation strategies, followed by two weeks to present these mitigation strategies, and then two weeks for the second PIC on March 15, 2017. Public comments from the second PIC are due by March 24, 2017 and a Final Report is to be completed around the April 7, 2017 with a final comment period for a 60 day review to commence on April 22nd and 29th, 2017 with a comment closing date of June 24th, 2017 at which time the Environmental Screening Report will be completed and no further public comments taken.

Based on the information provided at the initial PIC, natural features such as the North Branch of the Current River and Penasson Creek were not identified as significant environmental features. Naturally sustained brook trout populations are significant features of the watershed, and thus need to be assessed in consideration of the proposed changes by the Municipality. An issue arises in that with the proposed timelines outlines above, no assessment of critical brook trout habitats were taken on either the Current River or Penassen Creek. The time to conduct such studies is in the fall. Therefore, with the timelines being presented, a reasonable, scientifically valid approach to assess impacts to brook trout cannot be undertaken.

Another consideration is the critical significance that upwellings and springs have on spawning habitat for the Brook Trout life cycle: upland areas that provide these locations of critical habitat have not been identified. The existing wood chip landfill may not be influencing these critical areas, as water would be able to percolate through natural wood fibers. In contrast, the placement of household waste has the potential to significantly impact water recharge zones, as the landfill fills and expands.

I find it extremely troubling that a Municipality would consider placing a Household waste landfill in a location bounded by two coldwater streams. Landfills leak. Wood waste leachate is very different that produced by domestic Household waste. Wood waste is natural and will break down over time leaving a minimal impact over the long run. Domestic waste has significant impacts on the environment (potential for mercury, cadmium and other heavy metals) that need to be assessed to understand what the potential short and long term impacts to the river and stream are.

Based on the information provided by the initial PIC and the lack of time to collect reasonable environment data to complete a proper assessment of impacts, a petition has been initiated to request the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change to "bump up" the current Environmental Screening Report to a Class Environmental Assessment. The "bump up" would require more detailed studies to be completed, impacts to be quantified and assessed with other Household Wastes, and more public consultations to be completed. There is currently no obligation to give notice to any of the landowners or recreational users of the Current River watershed about the proposed changes. We feel that there are many people that have a vested interest in the health of this watershed, and that a Class Environmental Assessment and associated procedures would ensure a detailed analysis on impacts and environmental risks.

As an aquatic biologist for 25 years, past President of the Speed Valley Trout Unlimited Chapter, and Ecological and Environment Advisory Committee member for the Region of Waterloo, it has been my observation that Household waste landfills are NOT located immediately adjacent to coldwater habitat, for good reasons. In 2017, we all know landfills leak. Putting one of the major rivers in the immediate Thunder Bay area at risk seems to be a non starter, but here we are.

We are requesting that people go to D&R or Skaf's in Current River and sign the petition, or email currentriver2017@gmail.com to be placed on the updated list. Within 3 days, we had over 250 signatures in support of a full Environmental Assessment being required.

UPCOMING EVENTS

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ASSOCIATION**
**Help Support Local
Fisheries Improvement
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We are pleased to announce that the North Shore Steelhead Association will be holding its
**34RD ANNUAL FUNDRAISING
DINNER & AUCTION**

at the Valhalla Inn in Thunder Bay on Friday, March 31, 2017.
Should you wish to attend tickets are \$60.00 each or \$600.00
for a table of 10. For tickets, you can call Frank Edgson
at 475-7712 or Larry Doggett at 939-1811
or email to northshoresteelhead@gmail.com

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Lynx are a valuable fur bearer and they make for spectacular taxidermy mounts.

Curiosity Killed The Cat!

By Lundy Thurier, Thunder Bay Area Trapper

Lynx have been known to travel over five miles a day. They can appear to be somewhere one day and gone the next! This can make for some frustrating trapping. The whole trick to trapping Lynx is to get your sets out to where they are going to be, not where they have already been.

While searching out their main food source, the snowshoe hare/varying hare, lynx will travel main roads and trails which are easier to navigate compared to the deep snow. All it takes is a whiff of a freshly baited marten box to divert their attention to a possible meal. Naturally, the lynx will take the path of least resistance. By walking the same trail into your marten boxes every time you check them, you create the perfect place to set a lynx snare.

The Snare

I start by having all my snares prepared at home and ready to go. The snares are made out of 30 inches of 1/16" wire, an Adams lock, and two ferrules. This length of wire creates a desired 8" loop. Once the snare is made, I take a folded four foot long piece of tie-wire and pass it through the tie end of the snare. This leaves two feet of wire attached to the snare and ready to be tied off in the set location. The snares are light enough that the doubled tie wire allows the snare to be easily manipulated into place. You can also twist the wires together to give them more supporting strength if needed. By having them pre-made like this, the snare can be set in usually under a minute.

Set Location

Before walking into my marten box I look ahead and see if there is any naturally narrow spots. Two spruce trees within a few feet of each other, or a space between some freshly cleared roadside tag alders are the perfect locations to hang the snare. If there isn't a natural occurring narrow spot like this, I will make my foot trail a foot or so away from a tree and then loosely block off the other side of the snare using some available brush. I like to set my snare within 10 yards of the main road. Once the snare is tied off to an anchor tree, position the snare in the opening with the bottom of the snare 8-10" from the ground. Loosely block off the sides of the snare to guide the lynx through it. Depending on the length of the trail, one or more snares can be set. Putting a snare on the tree your marten box is on can also catch a lynx circling the bottom of the tree sniffing out the bait. Since lynx often travel in family groups, double or triple catches are not uncommon.

Many trappers, myself included, claim to not have enough lynx on their lines to make them worth targeting. But no matter where you trap I can almost guarantee that at some point throughout the season a lynx will cruise down your trails in search of food. Taking the few extra minutes to add these to your marten sets can be one of the quickest and easiest ways to cover a lot of area and be successful in catching these elusive cats. Give it a try, have fun, and good luck out there!



Wild In The Kitchen: Grilled Fiddleheads

By Julia Prinselaar

One of Springtime's dinnertable treasures, fiddleheads are an anticipated treat from our forests and riversides. The Ostrich fern forms budding clusters of tightly-curved stems before maturing into the broad, feathery frond. People often liken fiddleheads to the earthy taste of asparagus, and they go great with wild venison steaks.

This low-carb recipe works best with firm, fresh-picked fiddleheads. I cook them on a cast iron grill pan, but you can experiment with the BBQ. Frozen fiddleheads can be thawed under cold water and patted dry before dressing, but are more of a challenge to work with since they tend to unravel.

Bacon-wrapped grilled fiddleheads (serves two)

You'll need:

- 400 grams fiddleheads
- 4 tbsp butter, melted (optional)
- 4 strips of thin-cut, fatty bacon, cut into 1/2 inch strips about 2.5 inches long
- 2 tbsp barbeque sauce
- Toothpicks

How to do it:

Preheat grill on medium for 4-5 minutes. Trim any brown or dark ends from the fiddleheads and lay flat on a plate.

Wrap each fiddlehead with bacon, overlapping enough to secure both ends with a toothpick. Using tongs, place each fiddlehead on the grill. Brush with a bit of butter followed by a brush of barbeque sauce.

Grill until the bacon is cooked, turning the fiddleheads in between and brushing lightly with barbeque sauce. Remove from grill, arrange on a plate and serve immediately.



Photo Courtesy of K. Ball - Silver Cedar Studio

FEBRUARY 24-26th

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- Sat. February 25th 9:00 am – 5:00 pm
- Sat. February 26th 9:00 am – 3:00 pm

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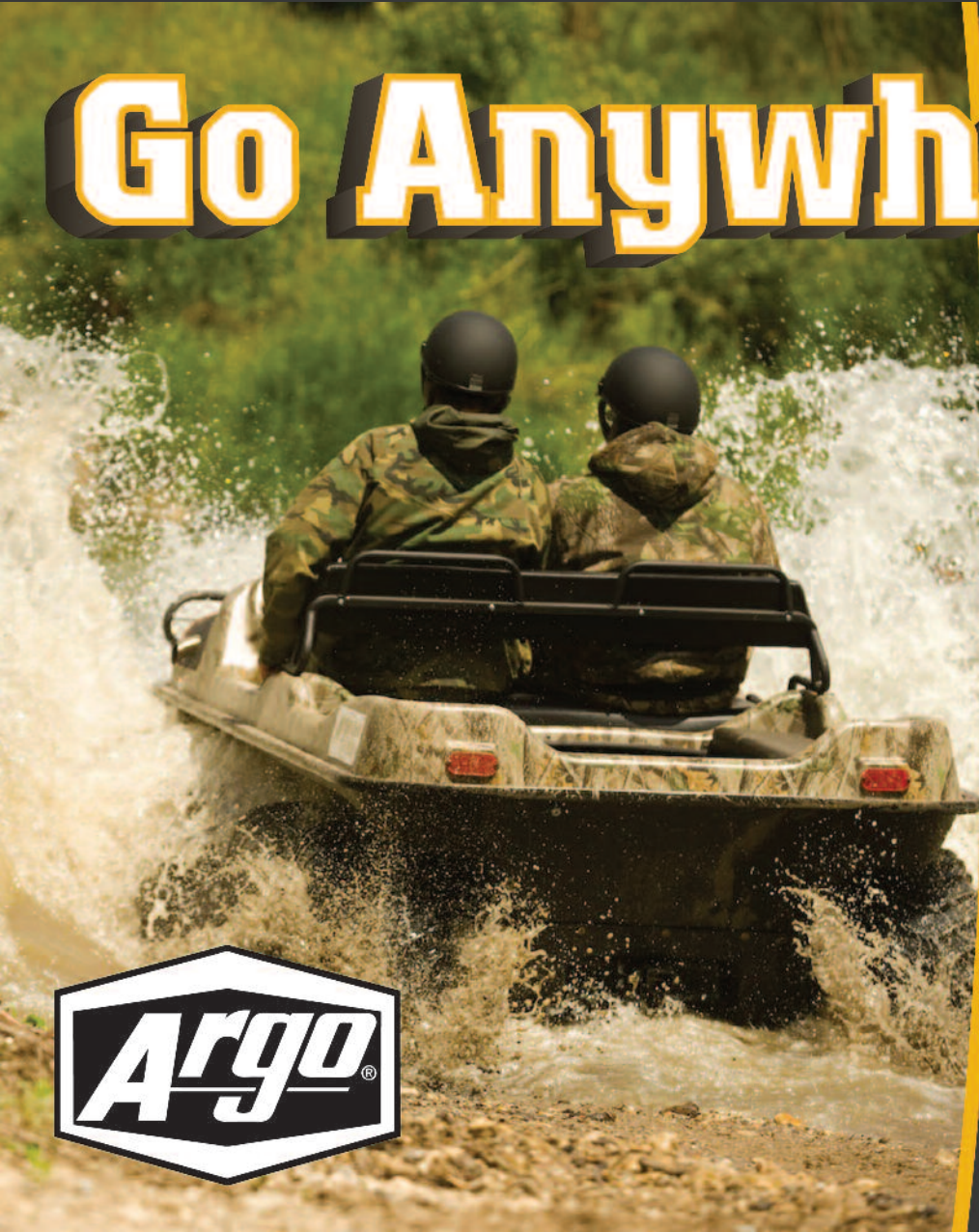
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THIS MONTH'S NEWS

Response to the Proposed Small Game Hunting Regulations from a Northern Ontario Falconer

Submitted by Jenn Salo, NOSA Member



Jenn Salo is a Thunder Bay Falconer who uses her bird to hunt small game.

Being a falconer in Northern Ontario is an exciting and fascinating recreational outdoor activity. It presents a unique and rare experience to hunt and train with a wild bird of prey. This sport gives the hunter a much different perspective into the world of hunting and provides an overwhelming sense of accomplishment. The proposed changes to the small game hunting regulations could potentially have a significant impact on my ability to find suitable game to hunt with my hawk throughout the season.

As an apprentice falconer, I have the permits and licences to legally trap, train and keep in captivity a Red-tailed hawk. To make the effort worthwhile, there needs to be suitable small game to hunt. The most suitable prey to pursue with a hawk in the area of Thunder Bay Ontario (WMU 13, 15B, 21A, 12B, 11B) is the snowshoe hare, ruffed grouse, spruce grouse and gray squirrel. The current hunting season for falconers begins Sept. 1 and encompasses the fall, winter and spring until and March 31 for grouse and June 15 for hares. Snowshoe hares are elusive animals that present a challenge to hunt in the winter as they are perfectly suited to the northern climate and environment. The current season is incredibly important to falconers as it provides an opportunity to target hares as the ground cover and fur colours transition with the seasons. As an apprentice entering her first hawk on snowshoe hare, I feel that reducing the season until March 31 would impact our success and learning opportunities, as March, April and May are seen as the most productive hunting months.

Another proposed change that would have considerable impact on practicing falconry in Northern Ontario is the proposed gun season for gray (black) squirrels in WMU 13. Squirrel hawking is the most easily accessible small game species for falconers to pursue as they are an urban species and are abundant throughout most of Ontario. The grey squirrel poses a threat to the protected red squirrel population through competition and the introduction of non-native diseases and pathogens. The proposed hunting regulations for gray squirrel are introduced for firearms only in WMU 5-15, with a bag limit of 5, possession of 15 and a season from Sept 1- Dec 31. On the other hand, WMU 36-50, and 53-95 have a falconry season from Sept 1-March 31. My question is, why is there not a falconry season introduced for WMU 5-15, if it is deemed suitable to hunt them with firearms? Having a falconry season for gray squirrels would improve my ability to hunt more frequently and provide valuable experience for my hawk and I.

Being a falconer in Northern Ontario presents unique challenges in finding and pursuing small game. The learning curve for training and entering a hawk on game is an incredible experience, and the proposed changes to the hunting regulations would negatively impact the opportunity to practice falconry in Northern Ontario.

Editor's Note: NOSA recognizes the significance of falconry as a legitimate form of legal hunting and we therefore support our member in her opposition to the current regulation proposals by OMNRF