

OUTDOORS

Clay County Pheasants Forever Banquet scheduled for Feb. 14



ONLY @ THE BANQUET : FEBRUARY 14, 2026



1925 WINCHESTER
MODEL 12



LOCALLY CRAFTED BY
P & H CABINETS
ANDREW HASLEY



2025 WINCHESTER
SX4 UPLAND



REGISTER
Today!

For generations, Clay County has carried forward a passion for conservation. **Chapter #42's Annual Banquet** is our moment to honor that tradition and continue the legacy. This year's live auction features a truly unique item **celebrating 100 years of Pheasant Hunting** in Iowa, a tribute to the heritage that connects past, present, and future outdoorsmen and women.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CALL

PAUL DANIELS
712.260.9549

ADAM KOHRS
712.260.1957

ASHLEY HERRIG
712.887.0270

STEVE WEISMAN
Outdoors Editor

The last day for Iowa's pheasant season was Saturday, Jan. 10. Some great late season hunts occurred, and helped make the 2025 season, the 100th year of pheasant hunting in Iowa, a much-remembered year. Except for a couple of December bad weather conditions, pheasant survival has been good.

Even so, people now look toward the rest of winter followed by early spring to see how the pheasant population handles potential rough weather.

At the same time, for upland supporters here in Clay County, the month of February becomes an extremely important time. First off, there is the 41st annual Clay County Pheasants Forever (Chapter 42) Banquet set for Saturday, Feb. 14, at the Clay County Regional Events Center.

That's right ... the banquet is on Valentine's Day and the slogan on the Clay County Pheasants Forever Facebook page is ...

Roses are red. Violets are blue.
This Feb. 14, a banquet awaits you!
Seats are limited, don't wait too long,
Grab your tickets now, before they're gone!

"Our chapter has been in existence for 41 years, and we're proud to host the 41st annual banquet," said Paul Daniels, chapter president. "Over those years, our chapter with the help of our donors, sponsors and community have raised funds that support habitat, education and heritage in our community. As a chapter, we are proud of these efforts, but these accomplishments would not have been possible without the generosity of donors, sponsors and community. We think it is appropriate that this year's banquet falls on Feb. 14, Valentine's Day!

Daniels continued, "We would like to give a special shout-out to Nelson Jewelry as this year's presenting Banquet Sponsor. We are extremely thankful for Tom Nelson's continued support of both our local chapter and Pheasants Forever nationally. Tom has donated significantly over the years both personally and through Nelson Jewelry at both our banquet and mentored hunts. He is an avid outdoorsman and gives of himself to help keep hunting traditions alive for future generations!"

ABOUT THE BANQUET

Held at the Clay County Regional Events Center, the doors open at 5 p.m. with the buffet dinner at 6 p.m. The live auction commences at 7 p.m., followed by the closing of the silent auction. For more information, contact Ashley Herrig at 712-887-0270 or email claycountypf@gmail.com.

Along with the usual fundraising auctions, raffles and games, Daniels notes there is something new this year.

"We will have something special for the youngsters, the Kid Zone with unlimited game play," he said.

One of the major draws will once again be a wind range of guns with a total of 30 guns auctioned and raffled off.

According to Daniels, a truly unique item will be on the live auction.

"It is a one-of-a-kind premiere plaque that celebrates 100 years of pheasant hunting in the state

of Iowa commissioned to be auctioned off only at this year's Clay County Chapter 42 Pheasants Forever banquet," he said. "It features the 1925 Winchester Model 12 and the 2025 Winchester 5x4 Upland along with a statement about the generations of the Clay County Pheasants Forever chapter."

WHERE THE MONEY GOES

Accomplishments are many and continue to grow. Here are just a few:

- Funding an annual postsecondary scholarship.
- Donating \$100,000 to the Clay County Youth Nature Center.
- Offering annual mentored hunts.
- Offering annual youth pheasant hunts.
- Burned over 7,500 acres in the past 10 years helping over 100 landowners.
- Assisted in the acquisition of over 1,000 acres of marginal farmland that was transferred into public hunting habitat.
- Contributed over \$20,000 to area youth shooting and archery clubs.
- Contributed \$4,000 for enhancement of Fallow Marsh in Palo Alto County.
- Contributed \$5,000 for the build a Wildlife Area.
- Assisting reorganization efforts for area chapters.
- Contributed \$5,000 for enhancement of Howard Vincent in Dickinson County.
- Contributed \$1,500 to area fire departments.

In discussing the chapter's efforts, Daniels noted, "For the past 41 years, Chapter 42 has been living our mission by promoting projects in Clay County. However, understanding that wildlife doesn't care about manmade borders nor able to read a map, we have begun expanding our mission to the overall region. From supporting outdoor youth clubs, land acquisition/betterment projects and area fire departments. We would like to think that our expansion efforts and the increase of pheasants in the region are directly correlated!

Daniels added, "We look forward to a great crowd for our banquet on Saturday, Feb. 14, and on behalf of the Clay County Pheasants Forever board of directors, we would like to thank our donors, sponsors and the community for their continued support!"

ON A NATIONAL LEVEL

Next on the docket is the National Pheasant Fest & Quail Classic 2026, presented by Federal Ammunition. Hosted by Pheasants Forever and Quail Forever, the Classic will be held in Minneapolis, Minnesota, at the Minneapolis Convention Center on Feb. 20-22.

Billed as the nation's largest upland trade show and convention, it has something for everyone including hunters, landowners, dog enthusiasts and just plain outdoor folks, both young and old.

The schedule for the trade show floor is Friday, Feb. 20: noon to 6 p.m.; Saturday, Feb. 21: 9 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.; and Sunday, Feb. 22: 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. To learn more, go to <https://www.pheasantsforever.org/pheasant-Fest.aspx>.

Last year's Pheasant Fest was held in Kansas City with nearly 24,000 in attendance. I attended the previous year's event in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. I had to take a deep breath and get myself acclimated before I began making the rounds. If you've never attended one, I highly recommend it.

Chickadee tax check-off donations rise while donor numbers continue to decline

DES MOINES — Last year, more than 4,600 Iowa taxpayers helped boost wildlife conservation with donations to the Fish and Wildlife Fund on their state tax form. This represents a decline of 12% from the 2023 tax year. Overall, the number of donors to the long-standing check-off have declined by more than half in the last 20 years.

About 0.3% of total taxpayers in Iowa donate to the affectionately called Chickadee Check-off.

While the number of donors decreased, the amount of money donated slightly increased. On returns received by October, more than \$138,000 was donated, a \$4,000 increase over the 2023 tax year. That's roughly 0.02% of all the tax refunds to Iowa taxpayers.

"We are extremely thankful for those who donate to wildlife conservation with their tax refunds. The funds are vital to our work on nongame wildlife which make up the vast majority of wildlife in Iowa," said Stephanie Shepherd, wildlife biologist with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources Wildlife Diversity program. "We would love to see the number of people donating increase but while it is a great opportunity for charitable giving, not a lot of people know about it."

The Fish and Wildlife Fund, commonly known as the Chickadee Check-off, is a mechanism the Iowa Legislature created in the 1980s for Iowans to donate to wildlife conservation on the Iowa state income tax form. Before this time, so called "nongame" wildlife had no dedicated funding. The Wildlife Diversity Program



The Wildlife Diversity Program has helped the eagle with its comeback in the state of Iowa. (Photo by John Walz)

still receives no state income tax funds and is primarily supported by this voluntary donation program on the state tax form and from the sale of Natural Resources License Plates.

Nongame wildlife are the 1,000-plus species such as songbirds, bald eagles, salamanders, turtles, monarchs, bees and more that make up the majority of wildlife in Iowa. Iowa DNR's Wildlife Diversity program is responsible for these species.

Funding helps to improve wildlife habitat, restore native wildlife, provide opportunities for citizens to learn about Iowa's natural resources and much more.

"One thing to be aware of if you're interested in donating is that the tax check-off line can be easily missed whether you are us-

ing paper or an online service," Shepherd said. "If using a tax preparer, be sure to remind them that they have a client that wants to donate."

Once located, donating is easy: Simply write the amount to donate next to fish/wildlife, which is line 21 on Form 1040, and the sum is either automatically deducted from the refund or added to the amount owed.

"Wildlife, like bald eagles, songbirds, bumblebees and chorus frogs, enrich our lives in so many ways, so I think of donating to the check-off as a way to say thank you," Shepherd said.

If hopeful donors miss donating on the tax form, they can still donate to the Wildlife Diversity program on the web at <https://programs.iowadnr.gov/donations>.

OUTDOORS BRIEFS

IOWA DNR SETS PUBLIC HUNTING, TRAPPING RULES MEETINGS

The Iowa Department of Natural Resources is hosting a series of town hall-style meetings where local staff will provide updates on recently completed hunting and trapping seasons, discuss possible changes to hunting and trapping regulations and address other topics as requested.

Local meetings will take place at:

- **6:30 p.m., Tuesday, March 3** — in Spencer at Iowa Lakes Community College (1900 Grand Ave., Suite B1). Use Entrance 1 on west side of the North Mall.
- **6 p.m., Wednesday, March 4** — in Spirit Lake at Maser Monarch Lodge (22785 Nature Center Road).
- **7 p.m., Thursday, March 5** — in Algona at Tietz Entrepreneurial Center at the Algona campus of Iowa Lakes Community College (2111 Highway 169 N.).

"We want people to come out to these meetings, listen to the seasons reviews, ask questions and hear directly from our staff," Iowa DNR's Wildlife Bureau Chief Todd Bishop said. "Part of the meeting will be devoted to discussing potential rule changes and collecting feedback as we work through the rules process."

The meetings are open to the public. Comments collected from these public meetings will be considered along with other related comments received by the Iowa DNR prior to proposing changes to hunting rules and regulations. Proposed rules will be presented to the Natural Resource Commission during a regular public meeting for consideration and additional public comment.

Comments received during previous listening sessions have resulted in regulation changes, including modifying and removing areas closed to Can-

ada goose hunting, establishing later goose season dates and increased bag limit, expanding the raccoon hunting and trapping season on private land, modifying Iowa's antlerless deer quotas in north-central and western Iowa, and extending the regular trapping season through the end of February.

MISSOURI AND BIG SIOUX RIVERS PADDLE FISHING SEASON NOW OPEN

DES MOINES — The paddlefish snagging season on the Missouri and Big Sioux rivers opens Feb. 1 and goes through April 30 (sunrise to sunset).

Anglers fishing for paddlefish must have a valid Iowa fishing license, along with a special paddlefish license and unused transportation tag(s).

Keep track of your effort and catch throughout the paddlefish season. Complete the electronic survey when the season ends whether you harvested a fish or not. The information collected will help the Iowa Department of Natural Resources evaluate the success of the season and determine what potential changes or modifications may be needed.

If you catch a jaw-tagged fish (numbered band in the lower jaw), call the phone number on the tag to report the tag number, date of capture, capture location and eye-to-fork length. The Iowa DNR and other state fisheries agencies tag paddlefish to better understand and manage populations. Tagging provides valuable information to estimate population size, fish movement and growth.

Low river levels might affect Missouri River boat ramp access.

For more information about Iowa's special paddlefish season regulations, visit the DNR website at <http://www.iowadnr.gov/paddlefish>.

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