

Dixon's Abundant Nature

by Susan E. Hohman

The Wild Delight of a Sportsman's Paradise

"In the presence of nature, a wild delight runs through the man, in spite of real sorrows." —Ralph Waldo Emerson



The appeal of the outdoors—the quiet and beauty of nature in its basic form, and the feeling of a return to simplicity are two reasons that people sometimes use recreational sports to escape the “sorrows” and stresses of everyday life. As Emerson, an American essayist and poet said, “a wild delight” runs through a man when encountering nature.

Due to the abundant natural wildlife in south-central Missouri, outdoor enthusiasts – hunters, fishers, trappers, hikers, boaters,

climbers, and campers – can take full advantage of it while living in or visiting our beautiful region. These outdoor sportsmen (and women) have a vast array of game or pastimes from which to choose. Fishing, bow-hunting, rifle-hunting, gigging, trapping, bird-watching, scenic view admiring, nature trail or rugged terrain hiking, and many other activities and pursuits are sure to enthuse the outdoor aficionado.

Some hunt and fish for the sport of it, enjoying all the preparation and effort required to bag some game and look forward to the “thrill of the kill.” Others participate in these activities because it affords them the opportunity to provide food for their families. Fresh meat—be it deer, rabbit, quail, crappie, squirrel, trout, or turkey—tracked, baited and hunted by man is an age-old means of putting dinner on the table.

The varied terrain of Dixon and Pulaski County, with its rolling hills, streams of all sizes, and great patches of forested areas surrounded by grassland is a veritable paradise for sportsmen



of all types. Providing natural habitats for creatures of different sizes, wildlife is abundant in our locale. In Pulaski County alone, there are three designated conservation areas in the Dixon vicinity: the Dixon Towersite, Gasconade Hills CA, and Riddle Bridge Access. Still considered to be in the Dixon area, but in different counties are Clifty Creek CA and the adjacent Clifty Creek Natural Area (Maries County), Rinquelin Trail Lake CA (Maries County) and the Jerome Access (Phelps County). These lands, managed by the Missouri Department of Conservation, allow hunting and fishing during posted seasons for those who have no private land of their own to garner game.

The Missouri Conservation website (www.mdc.mo.gov) provides particulars in regard to hunting and fishing seasons and cost for permits, places where different wildlife is available, the wildlife population of a spot, and specific activities presented in a conservation area. Of course, these are not the only regions where wildlife can be watched, hunted, trapped, or caught. However, these are available to anyone. Private farms and lands that do NOT have “no hunting,” “no fishing,” “no trespassing,” or other prohibitive signs and warning colors posted MAY be available, if the landowner gives specific permission to potential huntsmen.

Deer hunting is a popular pastime in our locale. The season is almost a regional “holiday,” and young hunters are treated with all the accompanying fanfare of a “rite of passage!” Whether your preferred weapon is bow and arrow, muzzleloader, or rifle, there is a season for you and plenty of good hunting spots from which to choose. The white-tailed deer (*Odocoileus*



virginianus) is—to quote from the MDC website—“a symbol of the majestic Missouri wild.” These magnificent creatures with their beautiful coats and lovely eyes (not to mention the male’s enticing rack of antlers) draw the avid hunter to try his skill at scoring a kill. The outdoor sportsman virtually can hunt deer locally from mid-September through January.

Wild turkey is another hunter’s favorite in our region. With an abundance of forest lands, woodlands, lakes, ponds, old fields and native prairies in the Dixon area, many turkeys make their homes in these natural habitats. Again quoting from the MDC website, “Missouri offers some of the best turkey-hunting in the nation.” Patient hunters with all the right paraphernalia can bag a few gobblers during the season to help fill their freezers.

Other small game, such as rabbits and squirrels are also numerous. The Beverly Hillbillies’ Jed Clampett and “Granny” made eating southern-fried muskrat, ‘possum shanks, smoked crawdads, or blackbird pie’ sound like the norm for folks of the Ozarks. Although not everyday fare on most tables, some people DO like wild game other than the popular deer, rabbit, and squirrel. Groundhog, raccoon, gray fox, red fox, coyote, bobcat and opossum are ‘critters’ that are

hunted for their furs and for their meat. Locally, trapping is allowed at specific times for the diligent huntsman. Beaver, nutria (*Myocastor Coypus*)—a large, semi-aquatic rodent,

otters, muskrats, and other furbearers can be trapped beginning in mid-November, usually.

Game bird hunters may enjoy hunting dove, pheasant, woodcock, Canada geese and snow geese, and crow with a small game permit. At times, quail and the ruffed grouse can also be bagged, although the present population is down severely in our area. This is due, in large part, to serious flooding in the spring and harsh winters, making nesting and the survival of the young quite difficult.

Fishermen need not drive long distances to bring home ‘the one that did NOT get away!’ Dependent upon the particular stream, lake, or pond the angler prefers, one may take bass, catfish, crappie, goggle-eye, suckers, sunfish, trout and walleye out of local waters. Both the Big Piney River (upper and lower) and the Gasconade River provide Pulaski County fishermen with some great catches. In addition, bullfrogs and green frogs can help fill October (between fishing and hunting seasons). Frogging allows the hunter to take the creature by a variety of methods: by hand, with a hand net, atlatl (spear), gig, bow, trotline, throw-line, limb line, bank line, jug line, snagging, snaring, grabbing, or pole and line.

Are we tired yet? For those who consider hiking a sport, numerous trails are found in the varying conservation areas and along waterways to provide ample walking mileage to enjoy the beauty of nature in our scenic environment. Bird watching, canoeing, nature walks and even possible eagle-spotting add to the beauty and value of living and visiting in this area. To summarize, escape to the beauty of nature here and be filled with wild delight!

