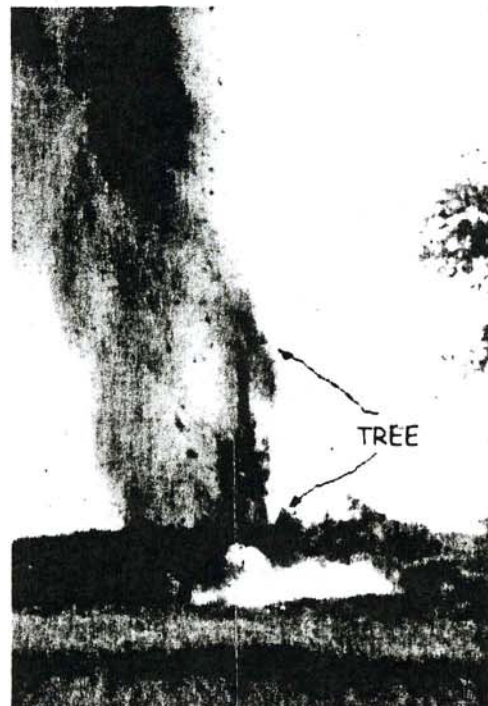


# To Blow or Not to Blow

By Murray Olyphant, Marsh founder  
and historian

The article in the January *Acorn* which mentioned blowing potholes in the Marsh, was correct but maybe confusing. We did blow them in our first marsh, the Woodrich Marsh, just north of Hugo in 1966. At that time wildlife people, particularly the DNR, were very enthusiastic about blasting potholes for waterfowl using nitrate fertilizer and fuel oil. Probably the main attraction was low cost. But also it was exciting, fun and good for getting the public interested. Our DNR people came out and did the blasting as a demo. (See the photo which shows that the dirt and plant material ejected flew mostly straight up at least 50 feet. An old stump flew over the trees and landed near me.)



By the time we were invited to work on the Schuneman Marsh after the Woodrich farm was sold, we all-pros and amateurs-had come to recognize that blasting out potholes made poor wildlife ponds. Waterfowl like a gentle slope into the water and a blasted pothole is mostly cup shaped with steep sides all around. Birds actually have to jump or slide in (not dignified) and fly out. Usually the walls fall in rather rapidly and partly fill up the pond but stay pretty steep for quite a while. This was obvious the year following our blasting at the Woodrich property. But it was fun!

By the time we got to use the Schuneman property, the chapter and waterfowl people realized we had to find money to excavate properly fashioned ponds. A good drag-line operator can sculpt just the slope and shape that waterfowl were supposed to like. The slopes were okay but the experts now say we made the ponds too deep. Actually a foot of water or two at the most is much more attractive to puddle ducks. The five small ponds were dug at a cost of about \$1,000. More than half the cost was borne by the state and some federal program. I sold a bunch of prints and the rest was raised by members' contributions. We were oversubscribed in 1970 but the government contributions were less in 1971 when we had the big pond excavated for another grand so we came out about even.



Another advantage of drag-lining is to build good spoil banks. The spoil bank around the big pond seemed to be the preferred nesting site for Canada geese. They like to see predators at a distance. We should have kept the spoil banks mowed. Well, maybe not. Wonderful wild-flowers grew on them.

Drag-line in action.