



IOWA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

# Iowa DNR News

## Conservation and Recreation

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Aug. 15, 2017

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## Iowa's dove hunting season opens statewide September 1



*Mourning doves are the most popular game bird in the country. Last year, 13,800 Iowa hunters harvested an estimated 131,000 doves. Season opens on Sept. 1. Photo courtesy of the Iowa DNR.*

Iowa's dove hunting season is just around the corner and hunters getting ready to pursue the country's most popular game bird are encouraged to visit the areas they plan to hunt before opening day.

"Investing some time in preseason scouting will benefit the hunter by seeing which fields the doves are using, and what condition the field is in," said Todd Bogenschutz, upland wildlife research biologist for the Iowa Department of Natural Resources. "Just because the area had a food plot on it last year, doesn't necessarily mean that it will again this year."

The Iowa DNR has a listing of state-managed public wildlife areas with food plots specific to doves at [www.iowadnr.gov/doves](http://www.iowadnr.gov/doves). Each area is linked to a downloadable and printable pdf that includes a map, any special regulations, and the local contact name and phone number. Hunters may also want to visit the Hunting Atlas at [www.iowadnr.gov/hunting](http://www.iowadnr.gov/hunting) when looking for areas to hunt.

If hunters are planning to try dove hunting on private land, they should look for grazed pastures with a pond, feedlots, or harvested crop fields, seed corn or small grain fields, basically any area with abundant bare ground, he said.

“There can be some good opportunities on these private areas, if hunters have permission to access them,” he said.

While most of the hunting takes place in early morning, it’s not the only time when doves fly.

“There are good opportunities to hunt in the evening, but be sure to be out there a few hours before sunset because the flight is usually over at sundown,” Bogenschutz said.

There are other benefits to hunting late afternoon, like significantly fewer hunters vying for the same spot.

“Doves provide a lot of excitement for hunters of all skill levels and are a great way to bring in new or young hunters. It’s easy to do and there are no special decoys or camouflage necessary,” he said. “Anecdotally, we are seeing doves here in good numbers, and I expect hunters will have similar success as last year.”

Hunters are required to have a valid hunting license and habitat stamp to hunt doves. Iowa does not require a migratory game bird fee. Dove season is Sept. 1 to Nov. 29, with a daily bag limit of 15 doves, and possession limit of 45. Legal shooting hours are from one-half hour before sunrise to sunset. Shotguns must be plugged to hold no more than three shells at a time.

Last year, 13,800 hunters harvested an estimated 131,000 doves.

Hunters will need to register with Harvest Information Program before hunting doves and other migratory birds. Go to [www.iowadnr.gov](http://www.iowadnr.gov) and click on Buy a Hunting or Fishing License link then follow the prompts to get to the screen with a link to register to hunt doves.

**Media Contact:** Todd Bogenschutz, Upland Wildlife Research Biologist, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 515-432-2823 ext 111.

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## Zebra mussels found in Carter Lake

The Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is watching Carter Lake after juvenile zebra mussels were recently found in a water sample collected by Nebraska Game and Parks Commission (NGPC) staff. Although veligers were detected, intensive sampling the past week did not find any adult zebra mussels.

Carter Lake, a border water, is jointly managed by the Iowa DNR and NGPC. The Iowa DNR and NGPC collect water samples and deploy settlement samplers in lakes across each state every summer to monitor for the invasive zebra mussel.

Water samples have been collected twice a month in Carter Lake since May. Additional samples are waiting to be analyzed. The DNR and NGPC will closely monitor Carter Lake this summer and fall to determine if it has an established population of zebra mussels.

“Finding zebra mussel veligers indicates to us that zebra mussels have been introduced into Carter Lake,” said Kim Bogenschutz, the Iowa DNR’s Aquatic Invasive Species Program coordinator. “But, it’s too early to tell if there is an established population in the lake.”

Zebra mussels look like small, D-shaped clams that have alternating light and dark bands. Most are less than one inch long. They are filter feeders that can form dense clusters as they attach to hard underwater surfaces. Large infestations may interfere with aquatic food chains, kill native mussels, clog water intakes, increase algae blooms, and cover beaches with dead shells. There is no effective treatment to control zebra mussels once they have infested a lake.

The Missouri River has an expanding zebra mussel population along its entire length downstream of Gavins Point Dam. Other known populations within Iowa include Clear Lake, the Okoboji chain of lakes, and the Mississippi River.

Zebra mussel veligers are microscopic and can be unintentionally transported with water in bilges, live wells or bait buckets. Adult zebra mussels can attach to boats, trailers and aquatic vegetation. Boats using both the Missouri River and Carter Lake are a probable source of introduction.

It is illegal to possess or transport prohibited aquatic invasive species, such as zebra mussels, in Iowa. Boaters must also drain all water from boats and equipment before they leave a water access and must keep drain plugs removed or opened during transport.

“Boaters and anglers can unintentionally spread zebra mussels and other aquatic invasive species if they do not take the proper precautions - clean, drain, dry - after each time out on the water,” said Bogenschutz.

- CLEAN any plants, animals or mud from boat and equipment before you leave a water body.
- DRAIN water from all equipment (motor, live well, bilge, transom well, bait bucket) before you leave a water body.
- DRY anything that comes into contact with water (boats, trailers, equipment, boots, clothing, dogs). Before you move to another waterbody either:
- Spray your boat and trailer with hot, high-pressure water; or
- Dry your boat and equipment for at least 5 days.
- Never release plants, fish or animals into a water body unless they came out of that water body and empty unwanted bait in the trash.

Find more information about aquatic invasive species and a list of infested waters in the 2017 Iowa Fishing Regulations booklet.

If you see a zebra mussel, please note its location and contact your local fisheries office or the Aquatic Invasive Species Program in Boone.

**Media Contact:** Bryan Hayes, Cold Springs Fisheries Office at 712-769-2587 or Kim Bogenschutz, Boone Wildlife Research Station at 515-432-2823.

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## Deer licenses on sale Aug. 15

Licenses to pursue Iowa's world class deer herd go on sale Aug. 15 at more than 700 license sales agents statewide and online at [www.iowadnr.gov](http://www.iowadnr.gov).

Resident Iowa hunters may purchase one any deer license for a gun season, one any deer license for archery season and one county specific antlerless deer only license.

The number of county specific license quotas for antlerless deer only has changed for 22 counties – 11 counties quotas increased and 11 counties quotas decreased. Hunters may purchase one antlerless only deer license until Sept. 15, then as many as they want until the season ends or quotas fill.

The price of an Iowa deer license is \$28.50. Excluding fees for license vendors and required \$1 fee to fund Help Us Stop Hunger, the price of an Iowa deer license has remained the same since 1991.

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## Landowners, hunters, bird watchers realize Big Marsh's benefits



*The 6,700-acre Big Marsh Wildlife Area has a mix of native prairies, timber stands and wetlands but the main feature is the three connected wetland segments. When at crest, Big Marsh can hold 1,200 acres of water. Photo courtesy of the Iowa DNR.*

Parkersburg, Iowa - The Big Marsh Wildlife Area is a working example of the benefits of taking wet farmland where crops struggle 70 percent of the time and creating a large public area with expansive wetlands and prairies attractive to waterfowl and waterfowl hunters, snakes, shorebirds, pheasants, deer, turkeys and even endangered wood turtles.

This 6,700-acre complex along the West Fork of the Cedar River, north of Parkersburg, is the end product of a vision held by the Iowa Conservation Commission when it began assembling the pieces in the late 1940s.

The decision by the Conservation Commission to locate the marsh along the West Fork of the Cedar River has proven to be a good one. The West Fork has a mile-wide flood plain at this location where even a 50 year flood can flood out a large area.

### **Helping landowners and growing the marsh**

Twice in the last 20 years, the Wetland Reserve Program (WRP) was instrumental in significant acquisitions for Big Marsh – 1998-99 and 2012.

In 1998-99, the WRP was used to acquire five properties in the floodplain covering 700 acres. The acquisition paused until 2012, when the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) received a grant that provided \$3.8 million for WRP in the Cedar River and the West Fork of the Cedar River watersheds.

Jason Auel, wildlife biologist for Big Marsh, knew there was high demand for WRP by landowners in the area with flood prone land after three properties were purchased from flood of 2008.

When the \$3.8 million became available in 2012, Butler County had 14 landowners on the waiting list. The money was gone in six weeks, adding nearly 1,500 acres to Big Marsh.

“It was crazy – it was like people were knocking down my door asking about WRP and that was when corn was \$7 a bushel,” he said.

To broker so many deals so quickly took partnerships with the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). The NRCS would talk to landowners about WRP and then the Heritage Foundation would purchase the land until the DNR had funding available.

Today, when at crest, Big Marsh can hold 1,200 acres of water.

“There’s a lot of support for WRP in the area and for acquiring the parcels for public use,” he said. “Landowners are getting rid of property that’s not great for farming and using the payments to buy land that doesn’t flood and gets crops every year.”

A few landowners who did not get in during 2012 have since enrolled in their land in WRP which was then purchased for prairie and wetland development.

Auel is currently working with a landowner from Texas who is in enrolling 460 acres into the WRP.

“He had this property as an investment and was only going to enroll it in WRP after he was assured the state would purchase it for the public to use,” he said.

That acquisition includes a 320-acre field adjacent to Hwy. 3 and next to Dumont that will be developed as a showcase for how the partnerships work, including a water control structure that will be added to create a 100-acre wetland.

“This will be a pretty impressive area right here on Hwy. 3 after it’s finished,” he said.

Once all the land deals have been finalized and purchased, Big Marsh will be about 7,600 acres

“A person could almost walk from Hwy. 14 at C51 all the way to Dumont on public land,” Auel said.

### **Maintaining the marsh**

Managing a wild area of any size takes effort. Managing a wild area approaching 7,000 acres takes a lot of effort.

“We have to fight succession to keep the unwanted plants out,” Auel said.

It’s a constant battle using aerial spraying, burning, haying, grazing and regular spraying to keep the cottonwoods and willows out of the marsh and keep the reeds canary grass in check.

For the canary grass, the battle plan includes mowing and haying, with a dose of spraying after the canary grass greens up knocks back the aggressive invader.

“That works pretty well. The following year we get smartweed and arrowhead bidens (bootjacks and pitchforks) and other plants that ducks want. That lasts about three years until

the canary grass comes back and we have to do it again,” he said.

The area has habitat management leases providing 200 acres of food plots and cover crops. “If we don’t ‘farm’ it, it will be big fields of reeds canary grasses or willows,” Auel said.

The fields are planted with sorghum for pheasants and turkeys and millet to attract ducks and August makes or breaks the planting success. If the weather is right, the plants will have huge heads exploding with seeds.

### **Big Marsh has a big following**

Big Marsh has a strong local following and a large contingent of users from the Waterloo-Cedar Falls area. It also pulls hunters from as far away as the Lake Red Rock and Des Moines.

The area has a mix of native prairies, timber stands and wetlands but the main feature is the three connected wetland segments: Upper Pool, Middle Pool and Lower Pool.

The pools are each about three feet deep, with some deeper pockets where material was removed to construct the dikes. There is one ramp that provides access to the upper and middle pools. Only the southern third of the middle pool is open to hunting; the rest of it is a refuge.

On opening weekend of duck season, there’ll be 60-plus vehicles filling the parking lots and any available space including and along the access road out to the highway.

“It gets extremely busy,” Auel said.

Dove hunting continues to increase in popularity and Big Marsh has 100 acres of dove fields. Every dove field will have hunters on it, regardless if the season opens on a weekend or during the week. One of the most popular dove fields had 50 cars parked alongside it on the road for opening day.

The marsh does not support fish but the West Fork of the Cedar River does. Secret fishing tip: For a week or two in August after the dam is installed, the northern pike fishing just below the dam can be excellent.

Big Marsh hosts birding groups out of Waterloo regularly and is a popular destination for dog trials after the nesting season.

When fur prices tic up, trapping activity increases. Big Marsh is home to a population of mink with a reputation for having high quality fur.

### **Wood turtles**

Wood turtles are a state endangered species and are being considered for federal listing as early as 2020. These rare turtles are drawing a lot of attention from researchers.

A professor from the University of Northern Iowa has been monitoring wood turtles on the area annually from May to August, since 2010. A group of researchers from other states are coming to Big Marsh to learn about the Iowa turtles.

Iowa received a State Wildlife Grant from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to learn more about wood turtle needs, and it learned that wood turtles need more open riverine woodland

habitat to survive. Big Marsh has a forestry management plan to promote, in part, better wood turtle habitat. Auel has been incorporating tree cutting and other management practices to benefit wood turtles.

### **Filing the Marsh**

When Big Marsh first began to hold water in the mid-1950s, upstream and downstream neighbors began to complain that the marsh was flooding their property. Their complaint was taken to court where a judge ruled that the marsh couldn't be responsible for causing both upstream and downstream flooding at the same time, and ordered the parties to work out a solution.

The result was a court order that says the Iowa DNR cannot begin filling the marsh before Aug. 15, and must begin de-watering the marsh on the first working day after duck season closes in December.

A large metal plate installed on the bottom of the river anchors a series of Kevlar bags that inflate with the help of a compressor located in a nearby building creating a bladder dam.

"People think we should be holding water higher throughout the year, but we can't start until Aug. 15 because of this order," Auel said. "We can control what we can control. Our goal is to create the best habitat for wildlife and provide a place for our users to go. We would love to have tens of thousands of ducks on the area but weather and flooding throughout the year impacts on the quality of habitat in the fall."

One benefit of the court order is the ability to dry out the marsh which grows vegetation that is a food source to attract and hold ducks in the fall. The mudflats attract migrating shorebirds too.

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