



IOWA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Iowa DNR News

Conservation and Recreation

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Iowa Mussel Blitz

The upper Cedar River was the focus of this year's annual research project to inventory and map the distribution of Iowa's mussels, often called clams.

More than 50 biologists, students and volunteers collected 18 species of freshwater mussels in the Cedar River during the three day event held each August since 2005.

"We had excellent participation from our conservation partners, volunteers and county naturalists with this year's survey," said Scott Gritters, fisheries biologist with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR).

Live mussels were inventoried, measured for growth; and then returned to the water. Most of the mussels were found using a technique known as pollywogging, as researchers and volunteers crawl along a stream bed, probing the bottom with gloved hands.

"These studies help us learn more about mussels and the areas where they live and thrive," said Gritters. "We knew this area is biologically diverse, but we wanted to study the impact of the many dams on this stretch of the Cedar River. We are also working with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources to determine the best methods to restore some lost mussels or declining mussel species in our respective stretches of the Cedar River."

The Iowa DNR, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers started researching the disappearance of native fresh-water mussels in Iowa 12 years ago, including the federally endangered Higgins-eye pearly mussel. Once ranging across most of

the upper Midwest, this species has been eliminated from most of the river systems it once thrived in.

"Historically, there were maybe 54 species of native mussels in Iowa," Gritters said. "Now, it's about 42. Of those, nine are endangered. Another six are threatened and several more species are very hard to find any more in Iowa."

Over the past several years, stretches of the Cedar, Wapsipinicon and Iowa rivers have been stocked with walleyes and bass whose gills had been injected with the mussels' larvae.

"Stocking fish, something we commonly do anyway, is one way to reintroduce mussels into our rivers," he said. "We stock a lot of fish for our anglers and this way we can 'double dip', so to speak."

This year's Mussel Blitz documented some very rich and diverse mussel beds, mostly in the free flowing and wild stretches of the Cedar River. Mussels (and fish) flourish in this type of habitat.

Native mussels do not do well in soft substrates in our rivers, he said. The stretches immediately above the low head dams were nearly empty of native mussels. Impoundments block migrating fish, which are the main way native mussels move (hitchhiking) and the habitat above dams usually has silt and sand.

Mussels are a good indicator of the health of a river. The better the water quality, the more mussels there are in that water. Mussels compact the algae they filter then kick out the crushed pellet to waiting fish; much like how fish are fed at a fish hatchery.

Many of the major fish spawning areas are in mussel beds on the Mississippi River. That may hold true on the Cedar River as well. The abundant crayfish populations observed were using old dead remnant mussel shells for their homes. Crayfish are a vital food source for predatory fish including smallmouth bass.

"The whole river ecosystem runs better with native mussels living in it. Fish and mussels have 'co-evolved.' They depend on each other," said Gritters. "Our fish populations, water quality and the opportunities people have to enjoy the water improve with more mussel species in Iowa waters."

Media Contact: Scott Gritters, Fisheries Biologist, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 563-872-4976.

Blank Park Zoo Monarch Festival

A celebration of the monarch's journey from Canada, through Iowa, to Mexico, will be held Sept. 17, from Noon to 4 p.m., at Blank Park Zoo, in Des Moines.

"Each fall, the iconic monarch butterfly sets its sights on the mountains of Mexico. They travel, en masse, through our state on a journey that can be over 2,000 miles long. We are honored

to partner with the Latino Heritage Festival, to highlight the importance of this butterfly to our two countries," said Jessie Lowry, conservation manager, Blank Park Zoo.

In Iowa, the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Iowa State University and the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship have been looking at ways to help the local monarch population and to improve and expand the refueling areas for monarchs migrating through.

The Iowa DNR will have monarch experts available at the festival.

"We are excited to partner with Blank Park Zoo to bless the monarch butterflies on their long journey to Mexico. According to local legend, the monarchs arriving in Mexico this time of year are believed to be the souls of our ancestors returning home," said Joe Gonzalez, executive director, Latino Resources (oversees Latino Heritage Festival).

This year, a giant "Chinese dragon" style caterpillar will appear in the Festival's signature BUG PARADE at 2 p.m.

Monarch Festival Activities:

- Fourth Annual Children's BUG PARADE! Come dressed as your favorite insect, wear your wings, your orange and black, antennae or make your costume at the Zoo. There will be special prizes for First and Second place BEST COSTUMES.
- Polk County Conservation will be leading Insect Hunts and Monarch Tagging. They will demonstrate how to safely catch monarch butterflies to attach a tag. If these special monarchs are found in Mexico, they can help scientists track the migration.
- Numerous Plant.Grow.Fly. partners will be represented at the Festival offering hands-on activities, demonstrations and crafts for the whole family.
- Los Ninos del Tepeyac - Danza Folklorica is a dance group dedicated to learning and teaching about the Mexican culture through dance. This group will be performing at the Festival.
- Spend time exploring our Butterfly Garden and experience traditional Mexican music by Mariachi Azteca.
- Families and kids of all ages will be encouraged to take part in an interactive performance workshop called FOLLOW THAT MONARCH! by Carol Taylor's Patchwork Puppets.
- There will be a limited supply of free milkweed seeds available provided by Blank Park Zoo and People for Pollinators for festival-goers.
- The Latino Heritage Festival is Sept 24 and 25 in Des Moines

The Blank Park Zoo Monarch Festival is sponsored and supported by Wit's End Gardens, Blooming Prairie Nursery, Art Junkie and the Latino Heritage Festival.

For more information contact:

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Photos and video can be found here: <https://drive.google.com/open?id=0B9hof5afS1qBQmI2LXRabXItREE>

REAP assemblies scheduled in 18 communities

Iowa's Resource Enhancement and Protection (REAP) assemblies will begin next month, giving all Iowans an opportunity to discuss what their vision is for Iowa's outdoor recreation, soil and water enhancement, historical resources and land management and more.

REAP assemblies are locally led meetings where issues can be brought forth and voted upon. Iowans can discuss the program, recommend changes and discuss impacts in their area. Delegates may also be selected from the local meeting to attend the REAP congress in January at the State Capitol in Des Moines.

Each assembly represents a region of counties and participants are required to attend the region for the county in which they reside. Meetings are held in the evening and last approximately 90 minutes. A list of REAP assembly locations is available online at <http://www.iowadnr.gov/Conservation/REAP/REAP-Public-Participation/REAP-Regional-Assemblies>.

"These individual meetings are a great opportunity for us to meet with Iowans one-on-one and hear their ideas for their parks, trails, museums and other amenities," said Chuck Gipp, director of the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR). "Participation from community members is essential for all of us to work together to enhance our recreational opportunities in our state."

Each year, REAP provides funding for local projects through a grant process and each year, the requests for city and county grants exceed the amount available by two or three times. Since the program debuted in 1989, more than \$330 million has been awarded to more than 15,000 projects.

"REAP benefits every single county every year in one way or another, either through improved water quality, by preserving our historical assets or providing outdoor recreation," said Tammie Krausman, coordinator for REAP with the Iowa DNR. "It has and will continue to have a significant impact on the quality of life for all Iowans."

MEDIA CONTACT: Tammie Krausman, REAP Coordinator, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 515-402-8763.

Visitors to Big Wall Lake enjoying benefits of renovation, expansion



Big Wall Lake is a naturally functioning, natural shallow system, with acres of wild rice growing off of the main boat ramp. Its network of canals through the vegetation provides duck hunters with plenty of cover, and paddlers a day's worth of adventure. Photo courtesy of the Iowa DNR.

CLARION, Iowa - Big Wall Lake has character.

Once home to a small resort and an occasional source of ice used for consumption, the area has 30 or so duck hunting cabins on the southeast side and acres of wild rice growing in the marsh.

This natural wetland in north central Iowa is unlike anywhere else.

Big Wall Lake Wildlife Area is nearly two miles long covering just less than 1,000 acres. It is an important stopover for migrating waterfowl and shorebirds before they make the jump to the central Iowa reservoirs.

The area went through an extensive renovation from 2006 to 2008 that improved the water quality and overall health of the marsh.

"If someone is looking for a true, naturally functioning natural shallow system, this is it," said TJ Herrick, wildlife biologist for the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR).

Big Wall Lake has an extensive network of channels going off in different directions through the vegetation used by duck hunters to hide in. Paddlers could easily spend a full day exploring those channels.

"This area captures a pretty good portion of the state that doesn't have access to large natural marshes," Herrick said.

While Big Wall's history goes back more than 100 years, the system is experiencing a growth spurt of sorts today.

In 2016, the Iowa DNR, along with partners from the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation (INHF), the James and Patricia Dinsmore family and others secured and transferred a multi generation family farm on the west shore.

The Maxons worked with NRCS, INHF and the DNR to conserve their property, Herrick said. A part of the property had been farmed since the 1920s after a dike was installed to contain the lake. Two ag drainage wells were drilled down more than 180 feet with a direct connection to the local aquifer, and the land was tilled to remove water and make it farmable.

Since the acquisition, the wells have been closed, tile broken and the land used to build the dike has gone back to the hill from which it came. Over the years, a thick mat of dead cattails had settled along the old dike forming a temporary dam, but at some point this 30-acre area will be reconnected to the lake. Water is already percolating through the ground, reclaiming this section of old lake bed.

“This will be the deepest spot on the lake,” Herrick said.

The remaining 225 acres will be seeded to prairie and managed as an upland area without trees. It will protect the lake water quality and water level by filtering the runoff and keeping the rain in the watershed rather than draining to the well.

While that acquisition has closed, a 345-acre acquisition adjacent to the northwest corner of the lake is being held by INHF and is being restored through the NRCS.

This property was divided among several members of the Frye family who had a goal of keeping the land in habitat, including a 25-acre wetland basin waiting to be restored.

In north central Iowa, Big Wall Lake is a habitat oasis in a sea of highly productive farmland.

In addition to ducks and geese, the marsh has a huge population of bullfrogs and leopard frogs, has attracted sandhill cranes, American bitterns, black terns, Blandings turtles and yellowlegs.

The area already has good pheasant and deer hunting, but as the prairie grasses expand and mature, it will get even better.

Summer storm hammers Big Wall

Last summer, a storm with winds reaching 100+ mph moved through the area, knocking down trees and limbs, and blocking the road to the cabins.

“The peak winds hit around 3 a.m., and it looked like a war zone. Absolutely insane,” Herrick said.

However, not all news was bad. The cleanup benefited one of the permanent cabin residents with many years’ worth of free firewood.

Rice grows wild

Big Wall Lake has acres of wild rice growing off of the main boat ramp.

Wild rice requires clean water to grow and Big Wall Lake is among systems in five Iowa counties where it’s growing.

“Some people don’t want it here, but its incredible duck food,” Herrick said. “It’s not something we’re managing for or against; it’s just here.”

And it’s available to anyone who wants to harvest it.

The Big Wall wild rice is similar to that grown in Minnesota and Canada that sells from \$6-\$10 per pound.

Media Contact: TJ Herrick, Wildlife Biologist, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 641-829-3285.

Fall is a great time to catch fish

Fall is a great time to be outdoors with family and friends. The air is cool, the views are picturesque, lakes are less crowded and the fish are easy to catch.

“Fall fishing is one of Iowa's best kept secrets,” said Joe Larscheid, chief of the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Fisheries Bureau. “Fantastic fishing opportunities await both new and expert anglers. Get out and enjoy them.”

Cooler temperatures and shorter daylight times trigger fish to actively search for food to build energy reserves to survive the long winter. These predictable movements make them easier to find.

“Yellow perch, muskies, crappies, walleyes, largemouth and smallmouth bass go on a feeding frenzy before winter,” explained Larscheid.

The fall bite in lakes and ponds shifts to the main part of the day. Fish are more active during the day and will be close to shore. Target areas of a lake where the water is warmer, mostly in shallow water bays along the north shore.

“Use live bait, particularly minnows, small tackle and fish slowly when fishing in cooler water,” Larscheid said.

Look for panfish schools in open water near structure like a brush pile, underwater hump, drop-offs and rock reefs. Largemouth bass will be close to some type of structure during the fall like underwater brush piles, old road beds, rock reefs or weed lines. Quickly find fish structure locations with the online fishing atlas or download structure location maps from the [DNR's Where to Fish website](#).

Fish in streams start to move to their wintering areas in October. Stream flow is often lower in the fall; allowing better angler access. Channel catfish will move downstream from smaller streams to the deepest holes they can find in larger streams. Walleyes will move to the next deepest holes and pike to the next deepest.

Find tips for catching yellow perch, crappie, walleye, bass and catfish on the DNR website at www.iowadnr.gov/fishing. Check the [weekly fishing report](#) to find out what is biting where.

Media Contact: Joe Larscheid, Chief of Fisheries, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 515-201-3376.

Iowa's youth deer season begins Sept. 16

The Iowa deer hunting tradition will be passed on to about 10,000 youths who will participate in the youth deer hunting season, which opens on Sept. 16. This season provides an opportunity to teach deer hunting, wildlife behavior, and safe hunting practices to resident youths while they are under the watchful eye of a licensed adult.

"This season is all about creating a positive experience for the hunter. It's a learning season where mentors work one on one with the youth teaching hunting ethics and woodsmanship skills," said Jim Coffey, forest wildlife research biologist for the Iowa Department of Natural Resources.

The goal of the hunt should be an enjoyable and ethical experience, and harvesting a deer should be considered a bonus, not define the success of the hunt.

Coffey said during late September, hunters should set up near movement areas, like between bedding sites and food sources, along known deer paths and by acorn producing white oak trees.

The youth season coincides with the disabled hunter deer season for hunters who meet eligibility criteria. Both seasons runs Sept. 16 through Oct. 1.

Youth hunters must be under direct supervision of an adult mentor, with a valid license and habitat fee (if required). The youth license is valid statewide.

In addition, an unfilled youth season tag is valid for use during the early or late muzzleloader season or one of the two shotgun seasons. That youth must follow all other rules specified for each season. However party hunting with a youth tag is not allowed. A deer must be harvested by the youth with the tag. Youth hunters are also allowed to obtain deer tags for other season, just as any other hunter can do.

The youth deer season can bring mild temperatures and biting insects. Hunters should be prepared for success by talking to the meat locker ahead of time and bringing frozen water jugs and/or bags of ice to cool the deer cavity. They may want to bring a protective cover like cheese cloth to help keep bugs off the fresh harvest as well.

All deer taken must be reported using the harvest reporting system before midnight the day after the deer is recovered. Harvest reporting is a very important part of the deer management program in Iowa, playing a vital role in managing deer populations and hunting opportunities. Hunters have three options for reporting their harvested deer, the DNR website at www.iowadnr.gov, by calling the toll free reporting number 1-800-771-4692, or at any license vendor.

Media Contact: Jim Coffey, Forest Wildlife Biologist, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 641-774-2958.

New law allows approved pistol cartridges for use in rifles to hunt deer

Iowa hunters will have a new option this fall while hunting deer during the youth season, disabled hunter season and both shotgun seasons – rifles that are capable of shooting straight walled cartridges.

The new straight wall cartridge law was passed without dissent by the Iowa Legislature, and then signed by then Governor Terry Branstad on April 13. It was enacted to allow for a lower recoil option for older and younger hunters, but is available to all hunters in those four seasons.

The law allows for straight wall ammunition that was previously approved for pistol hunting to be used in rifles. The list of acceptable calibers is in the Iowa Hunting and Trapping Regulations (p. 31, www.iowadnr.gov/hunting) along with criteria for similar sized ammunition not on the list.

Depending upon the caliber, some straight wall cartridges will be effective up to 100 yards, but most will be effective to around 50 yards.

The new law requires individuals caught with a rifle capable of shooting ammunition not on the approved list while hunting deer to have their hunting privileges suspended for two years and receive a \$250 fine.

Iowa hunters encouraged to keep food safety in mind this hunting season

DES MOINES – Iowa Secretary of Agriculture Bill Northey and Chuck Gipp, director of the Iowa Department of Natural Resources, are encouraging Iowa hunters to follow proper field-dressing and handling procedures this hunting season to ensure they are able to enjoy safe and high-quality meat.

“The Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship oversee the local locker plants that provide processing for many hunters throughout the season. Following best practices in the field can help make sure you are able to enjoy safe, high-quality meat,” Northey said.

“Iowans look forward to hunting each year and the sport continues to gain great traction,” said Gipp. “We hope that hunters will heed these practices to ensure safety and enhance quality of

their game.”

Best practices:

Plan ahead – If a hunter is planning to take a deer or other game to a locker or other facility for processing, it is recommended they call or talk to the processor beforehand to ask how they prefer to receive the meat. Many processors prefer to receive the whole, hide-on, field-dressed carcass as the hide protects the meat during transport. Hunters should take their deer to the locker as soon as reasonably possible for best safety and quality.

Act quickly – It is important to field-dress game promptly after harvest, ideally within a half-hour. A game animal's body begins to decompose within one to two hours of death, especially if temperatures are unseasonably warm (above 40 degrees).

Proper equipment – Wear disposable gloves and use clean knives and utensils, both to keep the meat clean and to protect you from the animal's blood. (There are several illnesses which hunters can acquire from the blood of an infected game animal).

Proper containers – If you will be boning out the carcass yourself, be sure to use food-safe containers to store or transport the meat. Clear plastic, “zipper-lock” style bags (found in the food-storage section of most grocery stores) are food-safe, available in large sizes, and will not leech chemicals or cause off-odors or flavors. Do NOT use plastic garbage bags or other containers not designed and approved for food-storage to store your meat. Plastic garbage bags are NOT food-safe and may have been treated with scents, deodorants, or other compounds meant to reduce odors and discourage pests. These compounds can leech into your meat and cause off odors, off flavors, or safety issues. Processors are well within their rights to refuse game meat delivered in unsafe containers.

Disposal – Iowa law allows lawfully taken game carcasses and waste from home meat processing to be disposed with other residential waste, although your solid waste hauler may have some restrictions regarding the maximum size or weight of an individual bag. The waste should be sealed in plastic bags in lots that are similar in size and weight to a typical bag of residential waste.

No Dumping – Dumping a game carcass in a road ditch or on other public property creates a nuisance and is subject to enforcement under Iowa’s littering laws.

More information and a guide to proper field-dressing can be found at <https://extension.psu.edu/proper-field-dressing-and-handling-of-wild-game-and-fish>

Media Contacts: Dustin Vande Hoef, Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship, 515-281-3375; or Alex Murphy, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 515-725-8219.

Space available in upcoming hunter education classes

Hunter Education Classroom courses are offered by knowledgeable and certified volunteer instructors and Iowa Department of Natural Resources Conservation Officers. Classroom courses are typically 12-15 hours in length and are held over 2 to 3 sessions (days). In order to receive certification, a student must attend all sessions and pass the final exam.

Iowa law requires that anyone born after January 1, 1972 must be certified in hunter education before they are eligible to purchase an Iowa hunting license.

Upcoming Hunter Education Classes

Sept. 13, Exira, Audubon County Conservation Board

Sept. 13, Independence, Buchanan County Wildlife Association

Sept. 14, Tipton, Cedar County Conservation Board Office

Sept. 14, Peosta, Northeast Iowa Community College

Sept. 16, St. Charles, St. Charles Lions Hall

Sept. 16, Mt. Pleasant, Henry County Nature Center

Sept. 18, Clarinda, American Legion

Sept. 19, Dubuque, EB Lyons Interpretive Center – Mines of Spain

Sept. 19, Ames, North Grand Christian Church

Sept. 21, Iowa City, Fin and Feather

Sept. 23, Montrose, Lee County Conservation Board

Sept. 23, Williamsburg, Farm Bureau Building

Sept. 23, Mt. Ayr, Dragoon Trace Nature Center

Sept. 23, Lovilia, Lake Miami

Sept. 25, Grimes, Grimes Community Complex

Sept. 26, Toddville, Wickiup Hill Learning Center

Sept. 29, Davenport, Adventure Church

Sept. 30, Mt. Vernon, Mt. Vernon City Hall

Sept. 30, Palo, Palo Outdoors

Oct. 2, Sioux City, Elk's Lodge #112

Oct. 2, Kalona, Kalona Middle School

Oct. 5, Greenfield, Adair County Conservation Board – Greenfield Public Library

Oct. 7, Davenport, Izaak Walton League

Oct. 7, Fairfield, Southeast Iowa Skeet Club

Oct. 10, Osceola, Clarke Elementary School
Oct. 14, Waterloo, Hawkeye Community College
Oct. 14, Keswick, Keswick Fire Station
Oct. 16, Polk City, Butch Olofson Shooting Range
Oct. 17, Nevada, Gates Hall
Oct. 23, Polk City, Butch Olofson Shooting Range
Oct. 24, Ottumwa, Izaak Walton League
Oct. 31, Bellevue, Bellevue State Park Lodge

Nov. 13, Polk City, Butch Olofson Shooting Range

For more information on these and other hunter education opportunities, go to www.iowadnr.gov/huntered

Wait to prune oak trees

The best way to prevent the spread of oak wilt is to not prune any oak tree during the growing season. For that reason, the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) suggests to not start any pruning until at least the first frost.

“The risk of transmitting oak wilt through a pruning wound this time of year is low,” says Tivon Feeley, with the Iowa DNR’s forest health program. “However, to reduce the risk even further, it is best to wait until the first hard frost to start pruning.”

Oak wilt is caused by a fungus and has been present in Iowa for many years. A healthy oak tree can be infected by the fungus that causes this disease two different ways. The first is through open wounds during the growing season, when the fungus is carried from a diseased tree to a healthy tree with an open wound by a small beetle.

The second form of infection is through root grafts between oak trees of the same species. For example, if a red oak is infected and there is another red oak within 50 to 100 feet there is a good chance that the roots of these trees are grafted and the fungus can move from the diseased tree to the healthy tree.

The trees in Iowa most commonly impacted by this disease are species such as red, black and pin oaks, but white and bur oaks can be infected as well. If black, pin or red oaks are infected by the fungus that causes this disease they usually die within the same year they are infected. White oak and bur oak can often take a number of years before they succumb to this disease.

Feeley says symptoms to look for on infected trees usually include leaves turning a bronzed brown along the outer margins of the leaves. These leaves can often still have some green on them as they fall from the tree. The defoliation tends to start at the top of the tree.

Feeley recommends that if a tree is wounded from storm damage or pruning is required during the growing season, treat the wounds immediately with a wound dressing such as acrylic paint. Do not purchase pruning paints/sealants. Those products slow the tree's ability to seal over the wound, he said.

More information on oak wilt prevention and control can be found here http://na.fs.fed.us/pubs/howtos/ht_oakwilt/identify_prevent_and_control_oak_wilt_print.pdf.

Media Contact: Tivon Feeley, Forest Health Program, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 515-725-8453.