



IOWA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Iowa DNR News

Conservation and Recreation

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Fall fishing is one of Iowa's best kept secrets

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

“Fantastic fishing opportunities await both new and expert anglers, said Joe Larscheid, chief of the Iowa Department of Natural Resources Fisheries Bureau. “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 are more active in the fall,” explained Larscheid. “They eat more and more often to get ready for winter.”

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 reeks 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.

Its size, habitat diversity and location make Sweet Marsh a top birding and duck hunting spot in Iowa



Water levels are managed at Sweet Marsh to produce seeds for duck food and tall vegetation where duck hunters can hide. All of the water that flows through five main segments at Sweet Marsh empties to the Wapsipinicon River. Photo courtesy of the Iowa DNR.

Tripoli, Iowa - Wildlife biologist Jason Auel received a rather unusual complaint from a resident near the Sweet Marsh Wildlife Area in northeast Bremer County.

The caller said a sandhill crane was attacking its reflection in their window, pecking the glass and window sills and they wanted some help. It wasn't the first complaint he received about sandhill cranes – one earlier reported cranes eating a dozen acres of their corn.

"It had to be the first depredation call for damage caused by sandhill cranes," Auel said.

Sandhill cranes have used Sweet Marsh as a stopping point during their annual migrations, some staying behind to become residents. This year, at least eight young were successfully hatched. The scratchy call can be heard from the south end of the marsh. In the spring, their numbers can reach 100 or more.

The spring migration is huge at Sweet Marsh with bird species numbering in the hundreds and bird watchers in the thousands. It was included as part of the Wapsi River Bird Conservation Area that was formally dedicated in 2007.

"It's part of the Wapsipinicon River corridor which is an important migration highway. It's common to get dozens of warblers, neotropical species, shorebirds and thousands of ducks and geese," he said.

The spring migration is when Darrin Siefken begins his weekly visit to the marsh.

Siefken, of Tripoli, owns CrawDaddy Outdoors in Waverly that caters to people who enjoy the outdoors, which makes sense given his background as a Bremer County naturalist for 11 years. Siefken offers guided floats at Sweet Marsh Tuesday evenings from mid-March to mid-May.

During the two hour marsh tour, he points out different bird species, shows paddlers how the marsh is managed, and, with the help fellow Tripolian, Kip Ladage, offers photography tips.

"It's an amazing area," Siefken said.

For those not wanting to leave terra firma, there is a viewing area with a spotting scope overlooking the refuge on the southwest part of the marsh.

The Refuge

A roughly 200-acre waterfowl refuge in the southwest part of Sweet Marsh is closed to all access from Sept. 1 through the end of the duck season to allow waterfowl a place to rest and refuel on their journey south. It also provides shelter from bad weather and predators. This area is managed to provide millet, corn, occasionally soybeans or left idle to come up with annual weeds as food source to keep ducks around longer.

Duck hunting

Sweet Marsh Wildlife Area was developed in the 1950s as a stopover for ducks and has been popular with duck hunters ever since. Most of the hunters come from Bremer County and nearby Waterloo and Cedar Falls.

It covers more than 3,100 acres, with eight miles of dikes, six parking lots and three boat ramps. It has five pools connected through a series of canals totaling about 800 acres of water that includes Martens Lake, the second largest impoundment in northeast Iowa. The largest boat ramp is on Martens Lake and it will fill with boat trailers on opening morning of duck season.

Water levels are manipulated during the year to provide seed producing annual vegetation ducks can use for food and to create tall vegetation where boat hunters can hide.

One reason Sweet Marsh is so popular is that its habitat diversity can support walk in hunters, kayakers and large boat hunters. For less competition, Auel suggests hunters consider going out during the week, rather than on the weekend.

Massasauga

About 16 years ago, a neighbor reported finding a massasauga rattlesnake in his garden. The snake was caught, outfitted with a telemetry device and released in the marsh to track its movements. What they learned was it overwintered in crayfish burrows. The snake disappeared.

The last encounter of a massasauga at Sweet Marsh was a dead one on the road by the Martens Lake parking lot in 2011. It hasn't been seen here since.

Because of the potential for having a resident population of massasauga, Auel is required to follow federal guidelines to manage for this threatened species, like not mowing the dikes less than eight inches.

The massasauga is often mistaken for northern water snake that is also at Sweet Marsh. How to tell the difference

- Northern water snakes are found mainly in and around water
- Massasaugas tend stick to the prairie until hibernation
- Northern water snakes are aggressive
- Massasaugas are not aggressive
- Northern water snakes feed on fish and frogs
- Massasaugas feed on rodents, small mammals and frogs

Wild marsh life

Sweet Marsh is home to more than birds and fowl.

A black bear stayed here a few years ago and was seen swimming in Martens Lake. A moose and wolf have also wandered through.

The marsh is home to Blanding's turtles - with confirmed reproduction - and central newts. Red squirrels are here too and they are protected. Its home to red shouldered hawks and has at least five bald eagle nests. Ospreys stop by for a fish meal on the way south for the winter. Sweet Marsh was one of the first locations where otters were reintroduced in Iowa.

Pale green orchid is found here – it's not a showy flower, but it is rare.

"It's unique in size and habitat diversity that benefits from its location along the Wapsipinicon River corridor," Auel said.

Other visitors

Students from Wartburg College, Upper Iowa University and Hawkeye Community College visit Sweet Marsh for class. A boy scout built and installed an osprey nesting platform for his Eagle Scout project.

Mowed dikes are used for their easy access by kayakers, hikers, deer hunters and duck hunters with their bags of decoys.

Wild edibles

Sweet Marsh is a hotspot for wild asparagus, strawberries and mushrooms. Mushroom hunters stop at different times of year to search for morels, oysters, puffballs and chicken of the woods. Puffballs here have been the size of a volleyball.

Media Contact: Jason Auel, Wildlife Biologist, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 319-882-4252.

Iowa educators recognized for programs to get students outside, fishing



Faith Bruck, right, with Logan-Magnolia High School, received the 2018 Brass Bluegill award on Sept. 13 from Barb Gigar, left, with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources Fish Iowa! program. The Brass Bluegill award has been presented annually since 1996 to an outstanding local program that exemplifies the goals of the Fish Iowa! Angler Education program. Photo courtesy of the Iowa DNR.

Faith Bruck with Logan-Magnolia High School is the 2018 recipient of the Brass Bluegill award from the Iowa Department of Natural Resources Fish Iowa! program.

In 2015, Logan-Magnolia Schools' science teacher K.C. Kersten got a grant through Monsanto to develop a fishing pond and wetland area next to the school. The pond was stocked in the fall of 2016. In 2017, Bruck capitalized on the outdoor interests of her students and the newly stocked pond to create excitement about lifetime recreational activities through fishing. She also drew on student knowledge and expertise, having more experienced students help those who were just learning how to fish. About 85 students spent several weeks fishing and caught and released bluegill, bass, catfish and walleye during their Fish Iowa! unit. Pictures of students with their catches were posted on the school website.

Bruck's classes sparked a strong interest in fishing. Students continued to fish on weekends and they asked to do more fishing activities. Her unit also made many cross-curricular connections with the junior and senior high science classes, helping students become more aware of their environment and more conservation-minded.

Bruck and her colleagues currently are exploring ways to expand the fishing unit and take advantage of the on-site pond to incorporate other opportunities to get students active outside and enjoying Iowa's natural resources.

Bruck was honored at the September 13 Natural Resources Commission meeting. She received a plaque and a set of 16 spinning rods and reels for use with her classes.

Other educators recognized for their outstanding contributions to Fish Iowa! in 2018, include Spencer Bauer, Greene County Middle School; Megan Cook, Sac County Conservation Board; Larry Kadner, Marshalltown High School; Mike Richard, Ridge View Schools; Greg Villegas, East Sac High School; and Kate Zimmerman, Ringgold County Conservation Board.

Each program includes education, support and opportunities to get Iowans outdoors and connected to our natural resources through fishing. Bauer leads a fishing club for about 100 middle school students that includes 30-minute weekly sessions with fall and spring outings after school. Cook incorporates fishing into public events, school programs, and summer camps for about 300 participants. Kadner teaches design to 140 students by building lures and hosts an after-school fishing club with 27 members. Richard is a hands-on school administrator who not only advocates for, but helps lead, fishing outings at the elementary and high school. Villegas' P.E. fishing unit for some 150 students is well-supported by the community and connects with ecology and agriculture classes. Zimmerman uses fishing extensively in her conservation education programs for some 3,000 participants each year. She sums up the philosophy and many of these educators, "[Fishing] provides a skill set, mental and physical wellness, and passion for the outdoors that will teach ... respect [for our natural resources]."

The Brass Bluegill award has been presented each year since 1996 to an outstanding local program that exemplifies the goals of the Fish Iowa! Angler Education program.

Media Contact: Barb Gigar, training specialist, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 515-494-3891.

Join state park volunteers this weekend

Statewide Park Volunteer Day is this Saturday, Sept. 22. Iowans can help out at more than 40 state parks with activities that may include litter pick-up, staining or painting

buildings, planting trees, clearing trails and more.

Details including meeting times, locations and activities for each participating state park can be found at www.iowadnr.gov/volunteer .

Clean-up efforts are partly in anticipation of the 100th anniversary of the Iowa state park system, which takes place in 2020. The DNR is working with several organizations to create park improvements and plan activities for the centennial event.

Volunteers for the Sept. 22 clean-up day are encouraged to share their activities on social media with #iowastateparks.

Media Contact: Todd Coffelt, Chief, State Parks Bureau, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 515-725-8485.

Annual Fort Atkinson Rendezvous Sept. 29-30

Step back in time, to life in the 1840s at the Annual Fort Atkinson Rendezvous Sept. 29-30. The event takes place at the historic Fort Atkinson State Preserve in Winneshiek County.

This year's rendezvous will focus on the theme of "trade blankets," which were an important item for trading with Native Americans. Trade blankets were made both by Native American tribes, and by the French and British traders throughout the region. The rendezvous will feature several examples of trade blankets, as well as other items that were frequently traded in the 1800s.

The Fort Atkinson Rendezvous is a free, family-friendly event. Throughout the weekend, visitors can experience cannon drills, anvil shoots, period instruments and music, a flint and steel contest, primitive bow shoot, 1840s kid's games, cooking contest, melodrama and a bullwhip contest.

All participants wear clothes and uniforms of the 1840s and have trade blankets on display with thousands of period artifacts such as guns, tomahawks, knives, cannons, furs and supplies. Period crafts of all types are demonstrated throughout the weekend.

Event hours are 9:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m. on Saturday, Sept. 29, and 9 a.m. – 3:30 p.m. on Sunday, Sept. 30.

Fort Atkinson was an active military post for the expanding United States from 1840 to 1849. The purpose of the fort was to keep the Ho-Chunk (Winnebago) tribe on neutral ground in the Iowa Territory and to keep peace on the frontier between the Ho-Chunk, Sioux, Sauk and Meskwaki tribes and Euro-American settlers.

The fort was acquired by the State of Iowa in 1921 and the Fort Atkinson State Preserve Historic District was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2013.

For more information about the rendezvous and history of the fort, visit <https://www.fortatkinsoniowa.com/rendezvous-days/rendezvous-days-info>. The weekend rendezvous activities are sponsored by the Friends of Fort Atkinson and the Iowa DNR and are free and open to the public.