



IOWA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Iowa DNR News

Conservation and Recreation

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Water level to drop at West Lake Park ahead of restoration

DAVENPORT – The Iowa Department of Natural Resources will start lowering the water level at Lake of the Hills, Railroad Lake, Lambach Lake and Bluegrass Lake at West Lake Park on July 15 as part of a lake restoration project to improve water quality and recreational opportunities.

Relaxed fishing regulations will continue until August 1.

West Lake Park lakes will be under construction through 2020. Excess sediment will be removed from the lakes, shorelines will be stabilized and new fish habitat structures will be added.

Lake of the Hills is currently listed on the State's list of Impaired Waters due to high levels of algae. The overall goal of this restoration project is to improve water quality and recreational opportunities at West Lake Park and remove the lake from the Impaired Waters List.

West Lake Park is a very popular local recreational destination, hosting thousands of campers each year, and receiving over a ½ million visitors each year. The park is also home to local and national disc golf championships and the Quad Cities Triathlon. Park improvements are expected to increase visitation at the lake and provide better recreational opportunities to visitors.

Media Contact – Chad Dolan, Fisheries Management Biologist, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 319-694-2430.

Southwest Iowa hidden treasure boasts nature



Timber area at Eli Slusher Wildlife Area

Hamburg, Iowa –Eli Slusher Wildlife Area, south of Waubonsie State Park in Fremont County, offers a wild and rugged get-away-from-it-all kind of experience.

“It’s pretty much the most awesome spot in my six county area,” said Matt Dollison, wildlife biologist for the Iowa Department of Natural Resources in southwest Iowa’s Nishnabotna Unit.

If it’s possible, Dollison may be underselling it.

With limited access, the only way to get anywhere on the 517-acre public area is to hike, and while that can make it somewhat challenging, getting to the way out of the way places here is worth it. Timbered draws, prairie ridges, steep hills and deep valleys. It’s full of wildlife from the hardy - like deer, turkey and badgers - to the more fragile, like zebra swallowtail butterflies and, quite likely, the state endangered Great Plains skink.

Winding through a grassy overgrown maintenance lane ducking trees and downed branches leads to the former site of the Wanamaker family cabin. The cabin has been removed leaving area that has scenic views to the west and south and a great place to pitch a tent.

Walking over the former cabin site, Dollison points out different native plants. There’s nine-anther dalea, roundhead lespedeza, prairie blazing star, rough blazing star, croton. “This area is more diverse with forbs because the landowner mowed the area around the cabin, which suppressed the native grasses” he said.

Diversity began to show up in grasslands, too, when it was burned in 2016 as part of the Loess Hills Cooperative burn. “After we burned it the native plants just popped,” he said. And while brome has returned over time, Dollison said they will be using prescribed fire and other techniques to encourage natives.

Eli Slusher has only been open to the public since 2016, but has attracted bird watchers, hikers, mushroom hunters and a growing number of archery deer hunters. Being adjacent to Waubonsie State Park and its campsites, cabins and modern shower and restroom facilities, visitors can totally immerse themselves in Iowa’s outdoors.

Becoming Eli Slusher

Eli Slusher Wildlife Area was created in the spring of 2016, when Dr. John and Karen Wanamaker sold their land at a significant discount to the Iowa DNR so it could be enjoyed by everyone. Dr. Wanamaker was a leader in land stewardship and his commitment to protecting the land shows. The 420-acre Wanamaker tract was combined with the nearby Sundown tract to create the 517-acre Eli Slusher area.

The area was named after Eli Slusher who claimed it as a homesteader and is buried in a small cemetery a few hundred yards northeast of the parking lot.

Forest stewardship plan

District forester Lindsey Barney has completed a forest stewardship plan for Eli Slusher and will be presenting the plan at a future public meeting. Eli Slusher has a nice mix of bur oak, red oak, black oak, chinkapin oak, shagbark hickory, walnut and hackberries in its timber stands.

Etcetera...

- A two acre fish-able pond is not quite a half mile hike from the parking lot.

- On Earth Day 2019, 20 kids from Sidney High School visited Eli Slusher for a volunteer cleanup project.
- Iowa DNR staff have been and will continue fighting invasive and unwanted sericea lespedeza, autumn olive, dogwoods and sumac on Eli Slusher
- Nesting of red shouldered hawks, a rare occurrence in the state, was documented on the property a few years ago.