



IOWA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Iowa DNR News

Conservation and Recreation

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Oct. 8, 2019

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With its premier location on the migration superhighway - Otter Creek Marsh is about to get busy



Blue-winged teal at Otter Creek Marsh on a quiet day before duck season. Photo courtesy of the Iowa DNR.

Chelsea, Iowa - The viewing platform on County Road E66 can be a busy place when the annual migration is on. Looking out at the 3,800-acre Otter Creek Marsh, the platform offers an excellent view of tens of thousands of waterfowl, raptors and other birds as they zero in on this perfectly placed oasis during their journey each spring and fall.

Otter Creek Marsh Wildlife Area is a mix of wetlands, reconstructed prairie and floodplain timber in eastern Tama County that was specifically selected for development because of its species richness and location on a major migration corridor.

The 1,200-acre wetland attracts more than waterfowl, it also attracts trumpeter swans, sandhill cranes and the occasional rare visitor including common moorhens, glossy ibises, white faced ibises, swallow-tailed kite and black bellied whistling ducks and more. It's that potential for a unique and rare encounter that causes the parking lot to spill over to the road shoulder and the viewing platform to fill with birders.

"We re-direct water flow from Otter Creek from multiple channels and control structures to create habitat for waterfowl. We do have the option to pump water from the Iowa River, but if there's adequate water flow in the creek, it's not necessary," said Steve Woodruff, wildlife biologist with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources. "Habitat is our priority."

And it shows.

The habitat diversity extends beyond supporting the waterfowl migration. Blanding's turtles are here along with osprey and bald eagles. Some years, there's a good tiger salamander migration into the marsh.

Creating and maintaining that habitat takes a lot of work, from keeping the network of ditches clear of debris so water can be delivered to eight wetland segments, to protecting the integrity of the dikes and removing the log jams that come down Otter Creek.

All that work pays off when habitat attracts waterfowl, and the waterfowl attracts hunters.

"When we have good water, we could have as many as 80 vehicles here – some hunters will even spend the night in the parking lot," Woodruff said.

Hunters come from Tama and Benton counties, and Cedar Rapids, Marshalltown, Iowa City and Des Moines. Woodruff gets calls from as far away as Des Plaines, Ill., asking about water levels and duck numbers.

Otter Creek Marsh is one of the busiest areas in Woodruff's six county Iowa River Wildlife Unit, which is pretty impressive given that it's located in a low population area.

"It's tradition to hunt here for a lot of people," Woodruff said.

Trumpeter swans at Otter Creek

Otter Creek Marsh was a study area in the early days of the trumpeter swan reintroduction efforts and has played a key role in returning these charismatic mega-fauna to Iowa wetlands.

Trumpeter swans have been successfully nesting at Otter Creek for years but the nesting pairs dropped from two in 2018 to one this year, likely due to one of the swans getting shot here last year. Of all the positive happenings at Otter Creek Marsh, there is an unfortunate history of trumpeters being killed here.

Fifteen years ago, there were two swans were confirmed killed and one was suspected killed. In 2018, two swans were killed. In 2016, another one was shot. Shooting a

trumpeter swan will result in a \$1,500 fine and liquidated damages.

“We’ve had way too many trumpeters get shot here. One of the first rules of hunting is to positively identify the target before pulling the trigger,” said Woodruff. “And we encourage hunters to report any violations they witness.”

Etcetera

- Otter Creek Marsh is part of the Iowa River Bird Conservation Area, which was the first Bird Conservation Area centered on a river corridor.
- Hunting is not allowed in segments three and five on Otter Creek Marsh – those are refuges. Hunters also cannot shoot from the main dike channel
- Otter Creek Marsh is geared toward boats less than 16 feet long with mud motors. Hunting from a kayak or canoe is another method here on some of the more hard to get to segments. “The staff does the best possible job to create habitat for all game and non-game species, and provide the best possible recreational opportunities for visitors to enjoy,” Woodruff said.
- Otter Creek Marsh was the first place in Iowa where, in 1992, sandhill cranes reproduction was documented. It was also a study area for the otter reintroduction effort and is an otter release site.
- Opportunities outside of hunting include cross country skiing, hiking, bird watching, dog training (outside of nesting season – March 15 – July 15), shed antler hunting and fishing for bullheads and carp.
- Barn owl boxes are placed on the marsh hoping to attract a nesting pair of the state endangered species.

Media Contact: Steve Woodruff, Wildlife Biologist, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 319-330-7013.

Portions of Yellow River State Forest reopen following September flooding

HARPERS FERRY, Iowa – Trails and campground areas at Yellow River State Forest begin reopening following flash flooding in early September.

Little Paint and Big Paint campgrounds are now open, as well as the overnight backpack campsites, hiking trails, and the picnic areas. Frontier equestrian campground, equestrian trails and equestrian day-use will open on Friday, October 11. Creekside equestrian campground and a segment of the Firetower road will remain closed until further notice.

Users are urged to use caution while using the trail system and obey all closed areas throughout the forest due to saturation of grounds. For the latest updates and a list of closures, visit <https://www.iowadnr.gov/Places-to-Go/State-Parks/Alerts-and-Closures>.

Media Contact: Rylan Retallick, DNR Park Manager, 563.586.2254, Rylan.Retallick@dnr.iowa.gov

Hunting pheasants is the topic of upcoming Learn to Hunt workshops

The Iowa Department of Natural Resources is offering Learn to Hunt Opportunities and Mentored Hunts around the state.

- Oct. 16, 6-9 p.m. - Learn to Hunt: Pheasant Habitat, Biology, and Hunting Gear - Butch Olofson Shooting Range, Polk City - <https://www.register-ed.com/events/view/150610>
- Oct. 23, 6-9 p.m. - Learn to Hunt: Hunting Pheasants with Dogs and Wingshooting - Butch Olofson Shooting Range, Polk City - <https://www.register-ed.com/events/view/150617>
- Nov. 9-10 - Women's Becoming an Outdoors Woman (BOW) Upland Bird Hunting Workshop – Homestead <http://events.constantcontact.com/register/event?llr=dep4qyuab&oeidk=a07egkrkpkhba8f8064>
- Nov. 15-16 - Learn to Hunt: Northern Iowa Mentored Pheasant Hunt - Water's Edge Nature Center, Algona - <https://www.register-ed.com/events/view/149869>
- Dec. 6-7 - Learn to Hunt Pheasants: Workshop and Mentored Hunt, Butch Olofson Shooting Range, Polk City - <https://www.register-ed.com/events/view/146260>

To view and register for upcoming events, visit <https://www.register-ed.com/programs/iowa>. For more information, contact Jamie Cook, Iowa State Coordinator, Pheasants Forever Inc., Quail Forever, at 859-779-0222.

MEDIA CONTACT: Jamie Cook, Iowa State Coordinator, Pheasants Forever Inc., Quail Forever, 859-779-0222.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service - Media Advisory Highlighting hunting access at Neal Smith National Wildlife Refuge and across the country

Neal Smith National Wildlife Refuge
P.O. Box 399
9981 Pacific St.
Prairie City, IA 50228

Contact: Tina Shaw, Tina_Shaw@fws.gov, 612-713-5331

Highlighting hunting access at Neal Smith National Wildlife Refuge and across the country

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service are proud to expand access to quality hunting and fishing at national wildlife refuges and fish hatcheries across the country. Please join us on Thursday October 10, 2019 as U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Principal Deputy

Director Margaret Everson and Iowa Department of Natural Resources Director Kayla Lyon highlight recent successes in expanding hunting and hunter retention in Iowa and across the country.

What: Formal press event, followed by opportunities for media interviews

When: Thursday, October 10, 2019 10:00 a.m.

Where: Neal Smith National Wildlife Refuge, Prairie City, Iowa

Directions to Neal Smith National Wildlife Refuge:

Neal Smith National Wildlife Refuge is 20 miles east of Des Moines, Iowa and nine miles south of Interstate 80. From Des Moines, take Highway 163 to the Prairie City exit. Go straight from the off-ramp, and follow the paved 4.5-mile entry road to the Prairie Learning and Visitor Center. From I-80, take the Colfax exit and turn south on Hwy 117. Drive 6 miles following Hwy 117; turn right in Prairie City to continue on Hwy 117. Cross Hwy 163, and turn right on the paved entry road.