



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 16, 2021

- [Harsh winter conditions being felt on some Iowa lakes](#)
- [Ice-out channel catfish are biting](#)
- [Trout stocking in northeast Iowa streams starts March 29](#)
- [Viking Lake still recovering from 2019 drawdown](#)

Harsh winter conditions being felt on some Iowa lakes

The Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has received numerous reports of dead fish in lakes and ponds across Iowa as the ice cover disappears for another year.

Winter fish kills are common on Iowa shallow lakes during long winters with lots of snow cover. When lakes freeze early and receive a blanket of snow, it effectively shuts off the sunlight from reaching aquatic plants, which stops photosynthesis and the flow of oxygen into the water. The longer the ice and snow cover the lake, the less oxygen is in the water and available to the fish.

Signs of winter kills are visible shortly after ice-out when fish that died during the winter float and are blown to shore. In certain lakes, like Rathbun, Black Hawk, Storm and Coralville, these dead fish are often a source of food for channel catfish that will go on a feeding spree. Many anglers see this as an early season fishing opportunity for trophy-sized channel catfish.

“Winter kills are rarely complete kills. We get a lot of calls from farm pond owners who think they lost all of their fish in their pond to winter kill,” said Joe Larscheid, chief of the fisheries bureau for the Iowa DNR. “Our advice to them is to fish the pond in the spring, note the species, number and size of what you catch and talk to their local fisheries biologist about the health of the pond.”

Natural lakes winterkill from time to time and are part of the natural cycle. Fisheries staff are watching lakes and ponds with low oxygen levels that are at risk of having a winter fish kill. Many Iowa lakes and ponds are still under ice, so additional smaller, shallow ponds and lakes might have winter kills after the ice disappears.

While Mother Nature may be responsible for many fish kills discovered after ice-out, the Iowa DNR would like to make sure some other factor is not to blame.

“If in doubt, give your local fisheries biologist a call so we can discuss your situation,” Larscheid said. Find contact information for your local fisheries biologist on the DNR

website at www.iowadnr.gov/About-DNR/DNR-Staff-Offices/Fisheries-Management.

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

Ice-out channel catfish are biting

Channel catfish move close to shore and are eager to bite in many lakes and the large reservoirs across Iowa just after the ice is gone. The bite starts sooner in southern Iowa impoundments since they lose ice a week or two before northeast Iowa natural lakes.

After eating light during the winter, channel catfish put the feed bag on in early spring cleaning up small fish that died over the winter. Search for actively feeding fish on windblown shorelines and points where dead fish are piled up and the shallow water warms quickly. Keep the wind in your face and move often until you find actively feeding fish.

Use cut bait or shad sides fished on the bottom. To keep the bait on the hook, try using a 1/0 to 3/0 bait holder hook and enough weight (3/8th to 1/2 ounce) to cast into the wind. Bring along disposable latex gloves to handle the bait and help keep the smell off your hands.

Ice-out catfishing can be good in any lake that has an abundant catfish population. Iowa's flood control reservoirs, Rathbun, Red Rock, Coralville and Saylorville usually offer the best action. Try catfishing in Storm Lake, East Okoboji, Clear Lake, North Twin, or Black Hawk Lake in northwest Iowa soon after the ice is gone. Small impoundments in southern Iowa, like Don Williams, Big Creek, Lake Darling, Lake Wapello, Green Valley Lake, Lake Manawa or Lake Icaria, also offer good early spring catfishing.

Catfish can be found in almost every body of water across Iowa. Check the [weekly fishing report](#) to find out where catfish are biting.

Media Contact: Bryan Hayes, Fisheries Biologist, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 712-769-2587.

Trout stocking in northeast Iowa streams starts March 29

The popular trout stream stocking season starts on March 29. Find a list of stocked trout streams on the DNR trout stream map or the [Iowa trout streams webpage](#). All trout stream stockings are weather dependent and will be unannounced due to COVID-19 precautions.

The DNR Trout Program offers Iowa anglers a variety of trout fishing opportunities, including catchable stockings, fingerling stockings, wild trout, streams with restrictive regulations, easy universal access areas and remote streams with difficult access.

About 320,000 catchable-sized rainbow trout, 35,000 fingerling brook trout, and 20,000 fingerling brown trout will be stocked into hundreds of miles of northeast Iowa streams from the end of March through October. Funding to support the trout stocking program comes from the sale of hunting and fishing licenses and trout fees. About 40,000 Iowans and 5,000 nonresidents go trout fishing in Iowa each year.

Iowa's trout streams, open year-round, meander through some of the most scenic areas of the state. Get the most out of your trout fishing trip with information about each stream's location, qualities, and other fun facts on the [DNR trout streams webpage](#).

Media Contact: Mike Steuck, Regional Fisheries Supervisor, Northeast Iowa, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 563-927-3276.

Viking Lake still recovering from 2019 drawdown

The water level at Viking Lake was lowered eight feet during the summer of 2019 to improve the fish population. Now a year and a half later, the lake's water level has yet to return to normal levels.

The Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) closed the outlet gate in January 2020, after repairs to the gate were completed. Viking Lake's water level was on the rise with normal rainfall last spring. Then the rains stopped in July and drought conditions set in for the remainder of 2020.

Lake drawdowns are a common fish management practice that crowds the fish population for a period of time.

"Crowding fish into a smaller area makes them more susceptible to predation by largemouth bass and reduces the number of small bluegills in the lake to improve growth in the coming year," said Bryan Hayes, DNR fisheries management biologist.

Media Contact: Bryan Hayes, Fisheries Management Biologist, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 712-769-2587.