



IOWA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Iowa DNR News

Conservation and Recreation

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 11, 2021

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Midwest black bear population likely to expand into parts of Iowa in the not too distant future



A black bear is looking for an easy snack from a backyard fly trap near Osage, Iowa in 2015. Photo submitted.

There's a pretty good chance that, in the next several weeks, Northeast Iowa will be visited by a few wandering black bears coming down from Minnesota and Wisconsin ahead of the breeding season. It's been an annual occurrence in this region each spring since 2014.

While much of Iowa does not have the habitat necessary to support a black bear population, certain locations do, primarily northeast, eastern and southern parts of the state. As black bear populations in Wisconsin, Minnesota and Missouri are stable to increasing, it is possible that a small population could set up residence in Iowa.

“Within the next three to five years, I think we can expect to see cubs show up and a small breeding population become established. If that occurs, we should look to our neighbors in Wisconsin and Minnesota who have learned to live with bears,” said Vince Evelsizer, furbearer and wetland wildlife research biologist with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR). “It won’t be perfect and there will be bumps along the way, but we need to start having conversation about the idea of bears coming back to Iowa, at least in certain places along the Mississippi River and Northeast Iowa where suitable habitat exists.”

Wisconsin’s black bear population is estimated at close to 30,000, Minnesota’s 15,000 and Missouri, which is holding its first bear hunt later this fall, as many as 1,000.

“For example, in Wisconsin, with that many black bears, residents have learned to make a few adjustments to minimize bear conflicts, like putting away their bird seed in the spring, putting away their barbecue drip pans, and by keeping pet food and garbage in places bears can’t access. There are still occasional problems, but these basic precautions result in much fewer negative encounters between bears and humans,” Evelsizer said.

Bears are omnivores and their diet changes with the seasons. In the spring, bears emerge from their winter dens hungry. They’ll feed heavily on newly emerging tender grasses and sedges. In summer, its berries, ants, various plants, and grubs. In the fall, its acorns and other tree nuts. They are also known to feed on nontraditional sources, like row crops, orchard fruits, and honey – which is similar to striped skunks and raccoons.

“They’re like a big raccoon, motivated by hunger and willing to take advantage of whatever food is available, from fawns to eggs, bee hives, bird feeders – this is where making some changes can minimize nuisance bear interactions,” he said.

Black bears are native to Iowa. However, Iowa has been without a resident bear population for more than 100 years. In the Iowa code, black bears are not listed as a species of wildlife found in Iowa because they were not present in the state when these laws were created, nor have they been since. This means the Iowa DNR does not have the legal authority to manage black bear populations through actions such as designating protection status or adding a limited hunting season if the population eventually support it in the future. Iowa is the only state among its Midwest neighbors where the state’s wildlife agency does not have regulatory authority to manage bear populations, which typically includes handling nuisance conflicts and conducting research.

While the Iowa DNR does not regulate bears, it does have a bear response protocol.

“The objective with the response protocol is to provide guidance for our staff in dealing with any potential human-bear conflicts that arise. A proactive strategy will increase the

odds for a better outcome for both the bears and for humans. For example, trap and transport of bears is a common scenario shown on TV shows, however in reality most states have moved away from this method because it often results in simply moving the problem to someone else's backyard. It's all about reducing conflicts where bears are instead," Evelsizer said. "We want to keep Iowans informed about this interesting and emerging wildlife story and increase our collective knowledge about bears in order to live with them successfully and minimize conflicts."

Since 2002, there have been 43 confirmed black bears in Iowa, and two to five per year since 2014. As bears have become more of a regular visitor, the chance to encounter a bear, although small, is a possibility.

"Black bears have some general tendencies and habits, but individual bears may go against the norm. Some are shy, others are not. They are typically secretive and want to be left alone – while others are bold and may be more daylight active," he said.

Bears are typically nocturnal but get more active during the June to July breeding season, especially at dawn and dusk. Most of Iowa's bear sightings start in late May continuing into July.

"If you encounter a bear, avoid running away," Evelsizer said. "Instead, back away slowly and cautiously while facing it. Make noise so they know you're there."

There are a number of resources available to help people minimize conflict with bears, Evelsizer said, including www.bearwise.org

Media Contact: Vince Evelsizer, Furbearer and Wetland Wildlife Research Biologist, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 641-231-1522.

DNR staff to discuss boating, paddling and safety at Altoona's Bass Pro Shops May 15 and 22

The Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) will have boating, padding and safety experts at Bass Pro Shops, in Altoona, May 15 and May 22, to talk with customers about lifejackets, safety and Iowa's upcoming season on the water.

"Kayak ownership is booming as more people enjoy and reconnect with the outdoors," said Todd Robertson, outreach coordinator with the Iowa DNR's Rivers Program. "We'll be here to answer questions and help them to enjoy Iowa's many miles of water trails."

Robertson, along with the Iowa DNR's boating law administrator and education coordinator Susan Stocker, will be handing out free water trail maps, litter bags, safety brochures and demonstrating the danger of low-head dams.

Stocker and Robertson will be stationed in front of the aquarium. They will be discussing general boating safety, reading a river, learning about water hazards and stroke and paddle maneuver tips. They will have information on river access points and riverside campgrounds, and ways to keep rivers and campgrounds litter-free.

“Most of our boaters will be busy getting their crafts out of storage and ready for the water. It’s a good time to review all the safety equipment in the craft to make sure it still fits and is in usable condition or if it needs to be replaced,” said Stocker.

IOWA WATER TRAILS 101- ACCESS, SAFETY & MORE

Event by Bass Pro Shops Altoona

May 15, from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.

May 22, from 12 to 4 p.m.

Free and open to the public

Fishing regulations relaxed at Pickeral Lake in Buena Vista County

LAURENS - The Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has relaxed the fishing regulations at Pickeral Lake in Buena Vista County to allow anglers to more freely harvest fish before the lake is renovated to eliminate an overabundant population of bullhead and restore water quality and habitat.

Anglers with a valid sport fishing license may harvest all sizes and unlimited quantities of any species of fish from Pickeral Lake by any means except by use of dynamite, poison, electroshocking devices, or any stupefying substances.

Liberalized fishing regulations for Pickeral Lake will be in effect through December 31, 2021. It is illegal to sell fish or stock captured fish into public waters.

The DNR will restock the lake in 2022 when water levels are adequate for stocked fish to survive.

Media Contact: Ben Wallace, Fisheries Management Biologist, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 712-657-2638.

Public invited to virtual trumpeter swan programs on May 15

As part of Wings and Wetlands Weekend, the Iowa Department of Natural Resources is partnering with O'Brien County Conservation Board to give two virtual swan programs on May 15.

9:30 a.m.- General swan presentation followed by a 20-minute panel discussion/questions/answers. David Hoffman (Iowa DNR), Anna Buckardt Thomas (Iowa DNR) and Margaret Smith (Trumpeter Swan Society)

11 a.m.- Trumpeter Swan research updates (Anna Buckardt Thomas)

Info regarding swan research at: <https://www.iowadnr.gov/About-DNR/DNR-News-Releases/ArticleID/3249/Trumpeter-swan-study-following-young-for-first-year-of-life>

Both presentations will be presented via zoom and is limited to the first 1,000 participants.

Join Zoom Meeting at <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82468337028>

Meeting ID: 824 6833 7028

Passcode: Swans2021!