



IOWA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

# Iowa DNR News

## Conservation and Recreation

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Dec. 26, 2017

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## Join a First Day Hike on New Year's Day

DES MOINES – What's the best way to spend New Year's Day? Take a First Day Hike in one of 27 participating Iowa state parks! Hikers can expect to be surrounded by the quiet beauty of nature in winter, and experience spectacular views, beautiful settings and the cultural treasures offered by Iowa's state parks.

All 50 states are hosting hikes as part of America's First Day Hikes initiative. In its seventh year, the national event encourages everyone to celebrate the New Year with a guided outdoor exploration.

"We are excited to host First Day Hikes again as part of this effort to get people outdoors and into our parks," said Todd Coffelt, chief of the Iowa DNR's State Parks Bureau. "These hikes are a great way to get outside, exercise, enjoy nature and welcome the New Year with friends and family."

Last year, more than 1,200 people began the year in an Iowa state park, hiking more than 1,100 total miles.

Staff and volunteers will lead free, guided First Day Hikes in Iowa's 27 participating state parks. Some hikes will include wildlife viewing and hot beverages. Hikes will average one to two miles or longer depending on the location. Details about the hikes can be found at [www.iowadnr.gov/firstdayhikes](http://www.iowadnr.gov/firstdayhikes). To see a comprehensive national map of First Day Hikes, visit [www.stateparks.org](http://www.stateparks.org). Participants are encouraged to share their adventures on social media with #FirstDayHikes or #iowastateparks.

Iowa [First Day Hikes](#) will take place at the following 27 state parks:

### **NORTHWEST**

Big Creek State Park

Dolliver Memorial State Park  
Gitchie Manitou State Preserve  
Ledges State Park  
Lewis and Clark State Park  
Prairie Rose State Park  
Springbrook State Park  
Stone State Park

### **SOUTHWEST**

Green Valley State Park  
Lake Anita State Park  
Viking Lake State Park  
Waubonsie State Park  
Wilson Island State Recreation Area

### **SOUTHEAST**

Elk Rock State Park  
Honey Creek Resort State Park  
Lacey-Keosauqua State Park  
Lake Darling State Park  
Lake Wapello State Park  
Walnut Woods State Park

### **NORTHEAST**

Bellevue State Park  
Cedar Rock State Park  
Maquoketa Caves State Park  
Mines of Spain State Recreation Area  
Pikes Peak State Park  
Pine Lake State Park  
Volga River State Recreation Area  
Yellow River State Forest

"America's State Parks provide havens for young and old alike to discover the tranquility and beauty of nature through outdoor recreation," National Association of State Park Directors Executive Director, Lewis Ledford said. "Hiking offers inspiring ways to improve your physical and mental health, while exploring beautiful public lands in every state." Last year, more than 62,000 people took part in guided hikes that covered over 114,165 miles on 1,300 different hikes across the country.

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

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## Missouri River paddlefish license on sale until Jan. 7

Iowa anglers have until Jan. 7 to buy their 2018 paddlefish license for the Missouri and Big Sioux rivers.

"Iowa anglers rarely get the chance to harvest a fish of this size," said Ryan Hupfeld, fisheries management biologist. "The average length of fish harvested last year was about 33 inches, but paddlefish can reach lengths over 50 inches and weigh more than 50 pounds."

Anglers must buy the paddlefish license on the DNR website at [www.iowadnr.gov](http://www.iowadnr.gov) or by calling 800-367-1188. A resident paddlefish license sells for \$22. Anglers must have a valid Iowa fishing license to buy the special license.

Suggestions from paddlefish angler surveys helped guide changes to this year's season to make it more enjoyable and provide a greater chance to capture a paddlefish.

Anglers can buy up to two tags – one from Dec. 15 to Dec. 31 and an additional tag from Jan. 1 to Jan. 7, or two tags if you didn't buy one in December.

The season has been extended, opening Feb. 4 and running through April 30.

Rough fish, including Asian Carp, can be harvested during the paddlefish snagging season.

The license, harvest tag(s), regulations, and survey card will be mailed to purchasers in mid-January. The postage paid survey card helps the Iowa DNR evaluate the success of the paddlefish season, so please fill out and return survey cards whether a paddlefish was harvested or not. The Iowa DNR is always working to improve the paddlefish season for anglers so any input provided is greatly appreciated.

The paddlefish license is required for the Missouri and Big Sioux rivers, but not for the Mississippi and Des Moines rivers.

For more information about Iowa's special paddlefish season, visit the DNR website at [www.iowadnr.gov/fishing/paddlefish](http://www.iowadnr.gov/fishing/paddlefish).

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## Ice safety reminder as Iowa lakes freeze over

The recent blast of arctic air is growing ice on lakes and ponds over much of Iowa. Anglers are starting to get out for the popular early ice fishing of the season.

“Many of us look forward to ice fishing each winter,” said Joe Larscheid, chief of fisheries for the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR). “It is a fun, social activity best enjoyed with family and friends.”

Anglers heading out are reminded to check the ice often as they make their way to their favorite fishing spot. The DNR recommends a minimum of four inches of quality ice for fishing and at least five inches for snowmobiles and ATVs.

“Check ice thickness as you go out. Ice thickness is not uniform on anybody of water,” Larscheid said. “There could be pockets of thin ice or places where the geese had kept ice from forming.”

Early ice offers an excellent chance for success. If fish are finicky, plan to cut a series of holes and spend 15 minutes at each hole targeting active fish. Use small baits and light line.

“Now that we have ice, we must go through our mental safety check list. Go with a friend and be sure to cut some test holes to check ice thickness as you go out,” Larscheid said.

### Safety Tips on the Ice

- No ice is 100 percent safe.
- New ice is usually stronger than old ice.
- Don't go out alone - if the worst should happen, someone will be there to call for help or to help rescue.
- Let someone know where you are going and when you will return.
- Check ice thickness as you go out - there could be pockets of thin ice or places where ice recently formed.
- Avoid off-colored snow or ice. It is usually a sign of weakness.
- The insulating effect of snow slows down the freezing process.
- Safety items in the bucket: Ice picks, about 50 feet of rope and a floatable seat cushion you can throw to someone in case of rescue.

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## Geode State Park restoration project underway

DANVILLE – The Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) will begin renovations at Geode State Park this winter to improve water quality at Lake Geode and enhance accessibility and recreational opportunities in the park.

Lake levels at Lake Geode were lowered in October as a first step in this large-scale renovation. The lake is currently fully drawn-down. Park users are advised not to cross the lake via the lake bottom as it is very soft. The lake will stay dry through 2018.

DNR hatchery staff collected some of Lake Geode's fish to use as brood stock, while fisheries crews moved a portion of the fish to area lakes. Many fish left the lake through the drain pipe into the creek and, eventually, made their way to the Skunk River. The draw-down effectively removed common carp and yellow bass, both undesirable fish species.

Lake restoration construction work will begin this January and continue through March 2019.

Work will include removing sediment, stabilizing the eroded shoreline, and building an in-lake silt dam, fishing jetties, and fish habitat structures. Local angling groups will help place additional fish habitat features in the lake bottom.

Campground improvements will begin March 2018 and continue through December 2018. Work will include rebuilding camp pads, replacing an existing shower building, installing a new pit toilet, adding more RV utility hook-ups, upgrading the electrical campsites to 50 amp service, and installing a new dump station.

Lake Geode is one of the lakes in the state selected for lake restoration work designed to improve water quality because of the potential economic return for the investment. Poor water quality has impacted the fish population and affected all water based recreation at the lake. Implementation of water quality improvement practices in the watershed is currently underway.

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