



IOWA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Iowa DNR News

Conservation and Recreation

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Stay safe this paddling season

Paddlers are itching to get out on the water after this year's long and cold winter. Review these simple safety tips before you head out on the water for your first paddling trip this year.

Check your canoe or kayak for any needed repairs or maintenance after being stored for several months. Look for holes and leaks, make sure all hatch lids fit snug and securely and check your paddle blades for signs of cracking or splitting.

Dust off your life jacket and make sure all buckles and zippers work properly and look for holes and tears. Replace the life jacket if it has damage that cannot be repaired. Wear a life jacket at all times while on the water, regardless of your swimming ability.

Wear a wetsuit or dry suit, along with layers, to help avoid hypothermia or cold water shock. Do not wear cotton. Dress for water immersion, not the air temperature. You can adjust your clothing needs as the water heats up over the next several weeks.

Always bring along a dry bag with a set of extra clothes you can change into if you get wet, a first-aid kit and a protected cell phone or weather radio. Pack plenty of water to stay hydrated. Stretch before you enter your boat to help prevent injuries.

Let a friend or loved one know where you are going and when you are expected to return. It will be easier to find you if you need help.

Be Aware of Changing Conditions

After snowmelt and heavy rains, water levels can rise quickly and produce strong and fast current. "Strainers" are numerous on most rivers, especially after high water events. A "strainer" can be a pile of tree limbs and debris, usually found on the outside of river bends where they continue to collect and pile up. The river's current can suck you under a deadly "strainer" and hold you underwater with little chance of escape. A "sweeper" is

found above the water's surface and can be a tree that is ready to fall into the river. Hanging tree limbs can knock you out of your boat or grab you by your life jacket or clothing and not let go.

Always be aware of where low head dams are on the river you are paddling. Never go over a low head dam. Watch for warning signs, as well as signs telling you where and when to get off the river. Put back in well downstream of the low head dam. The hydraulics of the dam will not let you escape as the turbulence of the water will be strong enough to keep pulling you and your boat under the water over and over again.

Jet skis, motorboats, water skiers and anglers will be out on the water when the weather is nice. Give everyone plenty of room. If a "wake" is approaching your boat, point the front of your boat into the wave to prevent your boat from tipping when the wave strikes.

New Water Trail Maps

Now that you are prepared for water fun, start planning your trip with the new Iowa DNR Water Trail maps. Pocket-sized brochures for a dozen water trails, including the Lower Des Moines, Maquoketa, South Skunk, and all of the Raccoon Rivers can be requested. Download easy-to-print PDF versions formatted to 8.5 x 11 from the Iowa DNR Web site at www.iowadnr.gov/Things-to-Do/Canoeing-Kayaking/Water-Trail-Maps-Brochures.

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Delay mowing of roadside ditches to protect ground nesting birds, pollinators

Iowa law prohibits mowing roadside ditches each year between March 15 and July 15, to protect ground nesting birds and to prevent nest destruction.

Roadside ditches, while not optimal habitat, can be the only grassy habitat available in certain areas of the state for ground nesting birds. As spring progresses, ground nesting birds, like eastern and western meadowlarks, Dickcissels, field and song sparrows, quail, gray partridge and pheasants, will use these marginal areas to incubate eggs and rear their young. The vegetation is also important to pollinators collecting nectar and for milkweed development that is critical for monarch caterpillars.

"It would help the cause if mowing was voluntarily delayed beyond the July 15 date to protect the late nesters and monarchs," said Todd Bogenschutz, upland wildlife biologist

for the Iowa DNR. He said an estimated 21 percent of pheasant nests are still active on July 15; that drops to 7 percent on August 1.

“It’s not the best habitat but we need to protect it for the wildlife that does depend on it.”

There are some exceptions to the law, however.

Mowing roadside vegetation on the right of way or medians of any primary highway, interstate highway or secondary road may be allowed prior to July 15 under the following exceptions:

- Within 200 yards of an inhabited dwelling.
- On right of way within one mile of the corporate limits of a city.
- To promote native species of vegetation or other long-lived and adaptable vegetation.
- To establish control of damaging insect populations, noxious weeds and invasive plant species.
- For visibility and safety reasons.
- Within rest areas, weigh stations and wayside parks.
- Within 50 feet of a drainage tile or tile intake.
- For access to a mailbox or for other accessibility purposes.
- On right of way adjacent to agricultural demonstration or research plots.

Violations on county or secondary roads should be reported to the county engineer or roadside manager in the county where it occurred; violations on state highways or interstate highways should be directed to the Iowa Department of Transportation.

Mowing is allowed to resume after July 15.