



IOWA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

# Iowa DNR News

## Conservation and Recreation

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**July 3, 2018**

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## High water conditions continue on the Iowa Great Lakes

The U.S. Geological Survey gauging stations put the water levels on the Iowa Great Lakes at its highest since 1993. Although lake levels are far from 1993s record levels, there are concerns about shoreline erosion and property damage.

Dickinson County Emergency Management, the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR), lake protective associations and shoreline property owners are asking boaters to consider the effects of their boat wakes and slow down. Any boat traveling over 5 mph or greater than idle speed can cause damaging wakes on flooded shorelines.

Emergency Rules have been placed on the Iowa Great Lakes limiting boat speeds. Boaters are asked to travel at 5 mph or less on all areas of the lakes when possible.

“Boaters need to be aware of their wake and the damages they could cause to low shorelines and sensitive infrastructure,” said emergency management coordinator, Mike Ehret. “People are encouraged to enjoy the water, but to do it at a lower speed.”

Mike Hawkins, Iowa DNR fisheries biologist, said some shoreline areas are experiencing erosion. “Most erosion is likely occurring from saturated soils and wind and wave action, with some of those waves coming from boats,” says Hawkins.

“Enforcement of the emergency rules has been a challenge, and officers are working their best to respond to calls and concerns,” said Jeff Morrison, Iowa DNR conservation

officer. Morrison explained that boaters need to use common sense and be courteous during this time. “With the holiday week upon us, there will be many people on the water enjoying the lakes. Plenty of activities can be enjoyed at speeds that limit your wake.”

Ehret, Morrison, and Hawkins stress that boaters should limit their speeds and protect shorelines.

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## Eldon, Fox Hills Wildlife Areas still wild after all these years



Ottumwa - Iowa's newest bird conservation area includes two public wildlife areas steeped in pioneer history and important to generations of Sac and Fox tribes. The Eldon Wildlife Area and Fox Hills Wildlife Area, near the Des Moines River southeast of Ottumwa, provide nearly 2,700 acres of public land to hike, hunt, birdwatch, fish and camp.

Anyone looking for quiet can find it here - the only sounds are birds and insects – no phones, no cars, no nothing.

“This is a bird watchers and nature lovers’ paradise,” said Jeff Glaw, wildlife management biologist for the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR). “With the habitat and food available, it should be a mecca for hunters, too.”

Bird watchers are coming thanks to the Soap Creek Bird Conservation Area. Hunters are another story.

While the area has excellent populations of deer, turkey, squirrels and other game, access is somewhat limited. Of the two, Eldon has better access and that is reflected in hunter numbers. During bow season, the Eldon parking lots will fill with mostly out of state hunters during the rut. But that can be deceiving – full parking lots could mean 12 hunters – or about 100 acres per hunter. Not exactly shoulder to shoulder.

The Eldon Wildlife Area ironically began as a quail study area in 1942-43 but over time, trees came in changing the area from brushy to forest. This new habitat began attracting neotropical birds, deer, squirrels, turkey, bobcats, and more. Glaw has been working with district forester Ray Lehn to enhance the benefits by improving the timber stands.

Lehn began a forest stewardship plan by walking the entire 1,290-acres, grouping the trees into 88 stands and prioritizing the stands according to the goal of managing for oaks. The plan called for removing some of the understory and thinning the canopy to allow sunlight to hit the forest floor, which is important for oak regeneration. The understory work has been going on for about the last five years.

“We’re making great progress getting all the high priority stands ready for harvest,” Lehn said. However, selective harvest is a small part of the overall forest stewardship plan.

While some trees are scheduled to come out, there are places where trees are going in.

“Fragmentation of timber is detrimental to interior forest bird species, causing problems like cowbird parasitism,” Glaw said. They added more than 100 trees this past year in certain areas to fill in the gaps and are replanting old crop fields with oaks, the later project was possible because of an Arbor Day grant.

Not all of the management focus is on timbered areas, however. Glaw is also working on a quail habitat component.

Quail prefer disturbed areas with bare ground plus shrubs, like wild plum, nearby for cover. The bare ground will be provided by dove hunting plots.

Across the river, the Fox Hills Wildlife Area has fewer access points and fewer hunters. It’s nearly 1,350 acres is divided into two sections separated by a half mile. The west section has a small lake that most likely does not receive much fishing pressure.

Fox Hills is on the same bluff as Garrison Rock Resource Management Unit which is managed by the Wapello County Conservation Board.

Board director Kurt Baker said the 302-acre Garrison Rock Unit was probably a high value site due to its location overlooking the Des Moines River.

Garrison Rock is home to a pioneer cemetery, a high quality oak hickory timber, hayfields that are being converted back to native prairie, more than 1-1/2 miles of hikable Chief Wapello Trail, and Horse Thief Cave.

Local folklore says Jessie James and his gang hid in Horse Thief Cave after stealing, you guessed it, horses. As for the story's authenticity, Baker is skeptical. He said a lot of communities have similar stories but it makes for good campfire fodder. The cave collapsed 50-plus years ago and is now a series of rock depressions.

### **Bat-tastic habitat**

Eldon, Fox Hills and Garrison Rock are home to all the common bat species in Iowa, plus the federally endangered Indiana bat. "It's a great area for bats to form summer maternal colonies under the bark of living or dead trees right here along the river," Glaw said.

### **Rare dragonflies, new species of orchid identified**

An Iowa DNR survey crew found 30 species of dragonflies and damselflies using a small pond on the west side of the Eldon area in 2012.

Little ladies tresses was identified last fall and while this is fairly common occurrence in Missouri, it is the first time this orchid has been documented in Iowa.

### **Winter spectacle**

The Des Moines River section between the wildlife areas stays ice-free in the winter which attracts thousands of geese and hundreds of trumpeter swans. It's a great spot to watch bald eagles as they survey the flocks for a potential meal. Some eagles have taken up residence year round

### **Nothing goes to waste**

Visitors will notice dead trees in the tree canopy. Some are ash trees that died at the mouths of the emerald ash borer. Others were intentionally girdled and left to stand.

Dead trees open the canopy that allows sunlight to reach the forest floor, provide resources and create habitat used by wildlife, and woodpeckers in particular. The area is home to the three species most common to Iowa – redhead, pileated and downy – and to lesser known species like red bellied woodpecker and hairy woodpecker.

**Media Contact:** Jeff Glaw, Wildlife Management Biologist, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 319-293-7185.

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## Backbone State Park ranked 6th in national Fishing and Boating sweepstakes

The Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation (RBFF) announced last week that Backbone State Park is currently ranked 6th in their Top 10 Mom-Approved Places to Fish and Boat sweepstakes.

Backbone, Iowa's oldest state park, is located three miles south of Strawberry Point. Dedicated in 1919, the 2,001-acre park is named for a narrow and steep ridge of bedrock carved by a loop of the Maquoketa River originally known as the Devil's Backbone.

Vote today (<https://www.takemefishing.org/momapproved/>) to make Backbone State Park a Top 10 U.S. destination.

RBFF has extended voting to July 20. You can vote daily. Each vote is entered for a chance to win a family fishing/boating trip in Florida.

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## Counting turkeys

Hunters can help the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) with its annual population estimates by reporting all the turkeys seen in July and August.

The DNR has mailed survey cards to select turkey hunters who are asked to provide the date and county in which the turkey was seen, if it was an adult female or adult male (males have beards on their breast), and whether there are young poults (baby turkeys).

There is a link to an online survey and survey card at <http://www.iowadnr.gov/Hunting/Turkey-Hunting> for those who did not receive a card.

Annual population surveys conducted by the DNR are an important component of the species management plans, which includes providing hunting opportunities. Hunter participation is appreciated.

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## Latest CRP continuous signup offers well-timed management solution for water logged Iowa farmers



*The Divan family enrolled a wetland basin in the northwest corner of their farm in Winnebago County that was prone to ponding into the Farmable Wetland Program (highlighted) a few years ago and have been enjoying the benefits ever since. Photo courtesy of Jeff Divan.*

Heavy rainfall in late spring and early summer has caused widespread ponding and flooding in northwest and north-central Iowa, but a recently announced continuous Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) signup provides farmers a well-timed opportunity to find long-term solutions for these problem spots in their fields.

The statewide CRP continuous signup 51 is targeting key water quality conservation practices, including wetland restoration, farmable wetlands, shallow water area for wildlife and saturated riparian buffers, said Amanda DeJong, state executive director of the Iowa Farm Service Agency (FSA). CRP is voluntary program conservation program administered by the FSA, an agency within the United States Department of Agriculture.

“Along with water quality and wildlife benefits, these practices can help improve a farmer’s net rate of return by reducing replanting, herbicide and fertilizer costs all while providing a consistent source of income through rental payments,” she said. “Using CRP to target less profitable areas of your farm can help improve and simplify the overall management of your operation.”

These practices can also provide farmers a wider planting window on the remaining areas of their fields.

“If the wettest areas are enrolled into Continuous CRP, farmers can plant much sooner, boosting their chances for healthier crops and higher yields at harvest,” said Curt Goettsch, chief agricultural conservation specialist for Iowa FSA.

Other water quality practices available in this signup include:

- Grass Waterways, non-easement
- Filter strips
- Denitrifying bioreactor
- Farmable Wetland Programs

### **Signup Details**

Eligible landowners must submit their CRP offers by Aug. 17. Because developing a suitable offer takes multiple steps, FSA suggests interested participants should visit with their local office no later than Aug. 1 to begin the process, said Goettsch.

Under CRP continuous signup, FSA provides eligible participants with annual rental payments and cost-share assistance. Signup and practice incentives, as well as certain rental rate incentives, are not available for this signup period. Continuous signup contracts are 10 to 15 years in duration.

Eligible land must be cropland that is planted or considered planted to an agricultural commodity four of the six crops years from 2008 to 2013, and is physically and legally capable of being planted in a normal manner to an agricultural commodity. A producer must have owned or operated the land for at least 12 months prior to submitting the offer.

Interested producers should visit their local FSA office.

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## **Hands-on outdoor programs brings wildlife up close**

MADRID - The Iowa Department of Natural Resources and the Iowa Wildlife Center are partnering in three events focusing on living with Iowa wildlife. The events are free and open to all ages.

The Learning Live at WildWay series will focus on turtles and snakes on July 8, followed by bats on Aug. 12 and raptors on Sept. 9. All events are held from 2-4 p.m., at the Iowa Wildlife Center’s WildWay, just south of Ledges State Park, at 1518 260th Street, Madrid. Directional signs will be posted on the day of the event.

Participants should dress to be outdoors, bring a lawn chair and water bottle. Due to the nature of this series, pets are not allowed. The event will move to the Oak Shelter at Ledges State Park if the weather or field conditions do not allow.

“We’re happy to provide the opportunity for people to learn and interact with these remarkable animals,” said Marlene Ehrisman, executive director for Iowa Wildlife Center.

For more information and event updates, go to <https://iowawildlifecenter.org/>