



IOWA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Iowa DNR News

Conservation and Recreation

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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DNR releases names of those involved in Clear Lake crash

CLEAR LAKE, Iowa – The Iowa Department of Natural Resources is releasing the names of the juveniles involved in Friday’s crash on Clear Lake involving two personal watercrafts.

Kyle Olberding, 15, of Glidden, was operating the personal watercraft that struck a second personal watercraft with McKenna Holahan, 17, Wynnee Bond, 17, and Ellie Shimp, 17, all of Cedar Falls, onboard. Shimp was transported to a hospital in Rochester, Minn.

Olberding’s passenger was Grant Borkowski, 16, of Carroll.

Olberding was charged with Reckless Use of a Watercraft – Iowa Code chapter 462A.12(1) and Operation of a Watercraft by an Underage Person Without Boating Education – Iowa Code chapter 462A.12(6).

DNR conservation officers remind those operating personal watercraft to stay at a safe distance from other personal watercraft and avoid what they commonly see on Iowa waters of one personal watercraft trying to splash nearby personal watercrafts.

Regardless of age, the DNR encourages everyone who will operate or ride as a passenger on a motorboat or personal watercraft to take an online boater education course, which can be found here: <http://www.iowadnr.gov/Things-to-Do/Boating/Boater-Education>.

Note: A criminal charge is merely an accusation and a defendant is presumed innocent until proven guilty.

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2017 Pheasant harvest tops 220,000, 2018 nesting forecast is mixed

An estimated 55,000 hunters harvested more than 221,000 roosters in Iowa last fall; a slight decline from 245,000 harvested in 2016. Hunters reported good success across the entire northwest quarter of Iowa.

An early look at the 2018 pheasant forecast begins with nesting success which is likely a mixed bag.

Parts of southern Iowa are dry while northern Iowa has been inundated with rain. Combined with a late arriving winter is a recipe for a stable to declining pheasant population.

“Our best indicator for the pheasant population is the August roadside survey, but our weather model gives us a pretty good guess what the population trend might be,” said Todd Bogenschutz, upland wildlife research biologist for the Iowa Department of Natural Resources.

Bogenschutz bases his prediction on a series of statewide weather indicators. The model uses historic correlations between roadside counts and winter snowfall, spring temperature and rainfall to predict this fall’s population trend based on current weather. The model has been used since 2002 and accurately predicts the population trend more than 80 percent of the time.

The statewide thresholds that predict an up or down population are 30 inches of snow, eight inches of rain and an average spring temperature of 54 degrees. Much of the state crossed the rainfall line and was cooler than preferred, but not all.

“It’s not all bad news,” Bogenschutz said. “We have a lot of mixed data especially in southern Iowa. That region didn’t receive much snow, and two of the three southern zones were at or below the rainfall totals that impact nesting. Anecdotally, we’ve received reports of more roosters crowing and male bobwhite calling in this area, which is a sign of good overwinter survival. Bobwhite could be abundant in southern Iowa this fall.”

More than 8,500 quail hunters harvested nearly 27,000 quail in 2017

The August roadside survey of upland populations takes place Aug. 1-15. Staff will drive more than 6,000 miles of survey routes across the state to assess bird trends. Results

will be posted around Sept. 10 at www.iowadnr.gov/pheasantsurvey.

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Remote and quiet, Willow Slough is a Mills County treasure



A great blue heron is resting on a muskrat hut at Willow Slough Wildlife Area after a mid-morning fish snack. The resident architect is chomping on a cattail nearby. Photo courtesy of the Iowa DNR.

Willow Slough Wildlife Area is the solution to the problem of what to do with land too wet to farm.

The popular marsh in northeast Mills County has been drawing duck and goose hunters from southwest Iowa and eastern Nebraska, and deer hunters from the surrounding communities since it was acquired in 1959.

But after the seasons close, it gets pretty quiet.

Like most state managed wildlife areas, 600-acre Willow Slough is open for recreation all year long. Pulling onto its west access lane, the miles of corn and beans give way to towering cottonwood trees, nervous deer bound away and mourning doves are quick to take wing.

Walking down the concrete boat ramp to the 150-acre marsh, the water begins to jump with frogs escaping to the safety of the water. Its west edge is covered with broad-leafed lotus in full bloom, hiding birds and bullfrogs looking to score an easy meal. There's a real quietness here if you don't count the chorus of bullfrogs croaking at full throttle.

The water surface is smooth as glass.

"I see a lot of potential here for kayaking, hiking and bird watching," said Matt Dollison, wildlife management biologist for the Iowa Department of Natural Resources.

He said hikers could use the two-mile long dike or the access lane for a hill-free experience. Given its location near the Missouri River, Willow Slough attracts a large number of bird species and waterfowl during the spring and fall migration.

Finding the prairie

Dollison has been responsible for managing Willow Slough for the past five years and over that time he has seen the area evolve.

He partnered with the Mills/Fremont chapter of Pheasants Forever to clear 29 acres of invasive bush honeysuckle near the southwest access lane and what returned was native prairie plants, like prairie blazing star. He plans to expand the reclaimed prairie to the east by removing more bush honeysuckle and cottonwood trees.

"Pheasants Forever has been a really good partner on this project," he said.

This same reclaimed prairie was once home to a small, isolated population of western massasauga rattlesnakes, last found here in 2007 by a professor at the University of Nebraska-Omaha.

"There are a lot of rumors about snakes out here, most of which are not correct with regards to safety," Dollison said. "The western massasauga is a really docile snake and we're not even sure if it's still here."

An extensive search of a small section of Willow Slough after it was burned in 2016, found no evidence of the snake.

There's a restriction of burning Willow Slough after April 1, to avoid killing the snake after it emerges from hibernation. Snakes are frequently found on areas post burn, because the dark background warms their body, and they're easier to see. He would like to search again only on a larger scale.

Teeming with life

Marshes support all kinds of life from the smallest insects to the top of the food chain predator and Willow Slough is no exception.

A great blue heron shares a muskrat hut with the resident architect. The heron enjoys a mid-morning fish snack on one side, while the muskrat is chomping on a cattail on the

other. It's also home to wood ducks, cedar wax wings, green herons, bitterns, pileated woodpeckers, painted turtles, northern shrikes and more. A bald eagle is nesting here and peregrine falcon has been spotted here. Dollison counted 125 muskrat huts last year.

The primary purpose of Willow Slough is for waterfowl, but it occasionally provides bluegill and bass fishing.

Hunting tip

The east side of the slough is full of cattails making it a magnet for pheasants wanting to escape a late season snow and for hunters looking for late season roosters.

Summer tip

Bug spray is strongly advised.

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