



IOWA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Iowa DNR News

Conservation and Recreation

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Hunters enjoy diverse experiences at Madison County wildlife area



Heritage Hills Wildlife Area's habitat diversity supports deer, pheasant, squirrel, quail and turkeys, bird watching, mushroom hunting, hiking and photography. The area in southern Madison County is a remote outdoor escape less than an hour from Des Moines. Photo courtesy of the Iowa DNR.

East Peru, Iowa - Heather Jobst arrived for a tour of a potential new wildlife area and was immediately struck by the uniqueness of the parcel's size, lack of internal roads and

its location less than an hour from Des Moines.

Jobst, the senior land conservation director with Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation (INHF), saw the potential in the nearly 400 acres of rolling hills, timber and prairie in southern Madison County and began a six month negotiation to purchase the private hunting retreat. The deal was finalized in early fall 2016.

In the late summer of 2017, the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) purchased the land from INHF and Heritage Hills Wildlife Area became the second largest state managed public area in the county. And word got out quickly.

“Hunters found it pretty early last fall,” said Bryan Hellyer, supervisor for the Iowa DNR’s southeast wildlife district. And why wouldn’t they. Heritage Hills has an oak hickory timber, food plots, reconstructed prairie, mature field in the Conservation Reserve Program and small prairie streams.

“There’s something here for everyone, whether you’re a nature lover or a hunter. It’s a neat landscape,” he said.

The landscape will support hunters looking for a hike-in hunting experience, to bird watchers and nature lovers. It’s a place for everything – grassland birds, deer hunting, hiking, photography and pheasant and quail hunting. Along the west edge of the reconstructed prairie, a covey of 20 quail could be still no longer and flushed.

“This is kind of an exciting thing going on,” said Nick Palaia, fish and wildlife biologist with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service out of Bloomington, Minn., who is responsible for regional grants for land acquisition and access. “We hope to see the neighbors’ kids shoot their first deer here or pheasant off this area.”

And while the area is already in excellent condition, there is some work to do.

This past spring, Hellyer’s staff burned about 300 acres of the upland and timber that took out a number of cedar trees off the hillsides and helped kick start the prairie reconstruction. The timber resource will be managed under a forest stewardship plan.

“We will be filling in abandoned ditches and removing undesirable trees, open up the grasslands, take trees off the remnant prairie. It will just take a little time,” said Heath Van Waus, wildlife technician with the Iowa DNR who will be managing the area. “Looking six years out, it will look a lot different.”

Hunters help fund Heritage Hills purchase

The Heritage Hills project was possible in part because of the federal taxes paid on hunting related equipment.

A federal excise tax on sporting arms and ammunition is used as a way to help fund wildlife related research, hunter education, shooting range development, land acquisition

and access at the state level. The funds are distributed to states based on a formula that includes the number of hunting and fishing licenses sold.

Heritage Hills funding was part of the Iowa DNR's 2016-2019 Statewide Wildlife Restoration Land Acquisition Program Grant funded with Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration program funds.

Heritage Hills home to threatened species

Part of the acquisition process included conducting bat surveys and surveyors found federally endangered Indiana bats and federally threatened northern long-eared bats on the area. Henslow's sparrows, a threatened species in Iowa, have been heard here.

As work continues on the habitat improvement, Heritage Hills may become home to other species of concern that have been found nearby, including regal fritillary – a prairie butterfly, and Edwards hairstreak – an oak woodland butterfly, as well as bullsnakes.

Media Contact: Bryan Hellyer, District Wildlife Supervisor, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 319-694-2430.

Lake Shawtee becoming not-so-secret pheasant and quail hunting spot



Plum thickets at the Lake Shawtee Wildlife Area are managed to provide food and cover for quail. The public hunting area in northeast Fremont County is in the region that had the highest quail counts in the state. Add in a higher pheasant population and hunters can expect a busy fall. Photo courtesy of the Iowa DNR.

Imogene, Iowa - A 1,200-acre grassland in northeast Fremont County has been hosting pheasant and quail hunters since the late 1980s. Positioned in southern Iowa's quail belt, Lake Shawtee is in the region with the highest quail counts in the state, and that saw its pheasant counts rise to the second highest in a decade.

This corner of Iowa is well positioned for a busy hunting season.

While Lake Shawtee will eventually be home to a lake, the Iowa Department of Natural Resources is managing it as a grassland and, with help from the Fremont-Mills Pheasants Forever chapter, is working to improve pheasants and quail numbers.

The partnership with Pheasants Forever has resulted in improving quail habitat along field edges and plum thickets to increase survival. The technique is to cut and leave trees and brush along row crop field edges. The area is allowed to grow up with seed-producing annual weeds. Weeds provide quail food and additional cover right in the brush.

Grass growing among plum thickets is sprayed to allow the area to come up in weeds with the similar food and cover goal.

With a significant focus on managing for northern bobwhites, Lake Shawtee is one of 23 National Bobwhite Conservation Initiative focus areas in the nation. Wildlife biologist Matt Dollison, and the technicians at the Nishnabotna Wildlife Unit, conduct quail and

pheasant call surveys from specific locations at specific times and the results can be compared to all of the other focus areas that follow the same survey protocols.

While most hunters come from surrounding counties, Lake Shawtee does host a few hunters from the Des Moines area, and from Mississippi, Georgia and South Carolina who likely found Lake Shawtee from its participation in the quail initiative. Lake Shawtee likely isn't the only destination for hunters, as Fremont County has more than 16,000 acres of land open to public hunting and neighboring Mills County has nearly 6,000 acres.

"Use on the area has picked up beyond the first two weekends, extending longer into the season," Dollison said. "While we don't have the pheasant numbers that northcentral Iowa has, our pheasant numbers have increased steadily since we started the counts in 2014, and we have quail, who's numbers have almost doubled in that same time."

Imogene, Iowa, Pop. 42

Just four miles northwest of Lake Shawtee is the town of Imogene, home of Emerald Isle restaurant.

"When I first purchased the bar, I thought there was almost zero pheasant hunting in the area," said owner Kevin Olson who purchased the bar nine years ago and has been serving hungry patrons his signature breaded pork tenderloin ever since.

But over time, he has seen his customer base wearing blaze orange grow. A significant portion of Emerald Isle's business comes from snow goose, pheasant, duck and quail hunters and Olson has come to recognize three sets of hunters who return each fall.

"They've become regulars, just once a year regulars," Olson said. "Its dollars you see come, that wouldn't be here otherwise."

This fall, Emerald Isle will hold its first longest pheasant tail feather contest. Hunters planning to stop in should know Emerald Isle is off the grid, as cell service is limited and they don't take debit or credit cards.

Media Contact: Matt Dollison, Wildlife Biologist, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 712-350-0147.

Fall community trout stocking starts October 19

Seventeen lakes across Iowa are gearing up to receive trout this fall. The Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) will release between 1,000 to 2,000 rainbow

trout at each location as part of its cool weather trout program that brings trout to areas that cannot support them during the summer months.

“Grab your neighbors, friends and kids and try trout fishing this fall,” said Joe Larscheid, chief of the Iowa DNR Fisheries Bureau. “It’s time well spent. The fish are here, easy to catch and good to eat.”

The fall community trout stockings are a great place to take kids to catch their first fish. A small hook with a night crawler or corn under a small bobber or small simple spinners such as a panther martin or mepps is all you need to get in on the fun.

Bringing trout to cities and towns offers a “close to home” option for Iowans who might not travel to northeast Iowa to discover trout fishing. A family friendly event is often paired with the stocking to help anglers have success and fun while fishing.

The popular program is supported by the sales of the trout fee. Anglers need a valid fishing license and pay the trout fee to fish for or possess trout. The daily limit is five trout per licensed angler with a possession limit of 10.

Children age 15 or younger can fish for trout with a properly licensed adult, but they must limit their catch to one daily limit. The child can purchase a trout fee which will allow them to catch their own limit.

2018 Fall Community Trout Stocking Schedule

Oct. 19, [Sand Lake](#), Marshalltown, Noon

Oct. 20, [Lake of the Hills](#), Davenport, 10:30 a.m.

Oct. 24, [Lake Petocka](#), Bondurant, Noon

Oct. 25, [Banner Lake \(South\)](#), Summerset State Park, Indianola, 11 a.m.

Oct. 25, [Big Lake](#), Council Bluffs, 2 p.m.

Oct. 26, [Ottumwa Park Pond](#), Ottumwa, 11 a.m.

Oct. 27, [Discovery Park](#), Muscatine, 10 a.m.

Oct. 27, [Wilson Lake](#), Fort Madison, Noon

Nov. 1, [Moorland Pond](#), Fort Dodge, Noon

Nov. 2, [Prairie Park \(Cedar Bend\)](#), Cedar Rapids, 10 a.m.

Nov. 2, [Terry Trueblood Lake](#), Iowa City, 11 a.m.

Nov. 7, [Bacon Creek](#), Sioux City, 1:30 p.m.

Nov. 9, [Heritage Pond](#), Dubuque, Noon

Nov. 9, [North Prairie Lake](#), Cedar Falls, Noon

Nov. 16, [Ada Hayden Heritage Park Lake](#), Ames, Noon

Nov. 17, [Scharnberg Pond](#), Spencer, Noon

Nov. 21, [Blue Pit](#), Mason City, 11 a.m.

Find more information about trout fishing in community lakes on the [DNR trout fishing webpage](#).

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