



IOWA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Iowa DNR News

Conservation and Recreation

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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2019 pheasant season likely impacted by February winter storm

Story after story on TV, the radio and in newspapers detailed the historic winter storm that swept across northern and western Iowa last weekend, stranding vehicles and closing roads for days. Drivers were warned repeatedly to stay off the roads because not doing so was “taking your life into your own hands.”

For Iowa’s pheasant and quail, the storm and this winter continues to be a life and death event.

The storm’s path dumped heavy snow on top of existing ice crusted drifts and blew it with 50 mph winds filling in every ditch, fencerow and CRP field. About the only relief is available in the cattails or winter shelter belts, if they’re available.

“This deep snow cover has buried all food for quail and most of it for pheasants,” said Todd Bogenschutz, upland wildlife research biologist for the Iowa Department of Natural Resources. “Areas with good winter cover adjacent to food plots are likely the spots where we’ll see better survival. Landowners managing for pheasant and quail should include food plots as part of their strategy.”

What will the impact be on northern Iowa’s pheasant population and southern Iowa’s quail? A quick survey of area wildlife biologists settled on one theme: Not Good.

Across southeast Iowa, frequent winter storms have created a snow and ice layered lasagna making it difficult for birds to find food. In southwest Iowa, two feet of snow on top of an inch of ice likely marks the end of the 2-3 year run of record quail population.

While winter claims some wildlife every year, the impacts this winter will be most heavily felt by pheasants and quail.

"I expect we'll see significant declines in both pheasant and quail this coming year," Bogenschutz said. "It's the toughest winter we've seen since 2013-14."

Media Contact: Todd Bogenschutz, Upland Wildlife Research Biologist, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 515-979-0828.

Harsh winter conditions being felt on some Iowa lakes

Spirit Lake - As more snow and bitter temperatures dominate the forecast across Iowa, the mild start of winter is a distant memory. More than two feet of snow sits on many lakes and ponds across northern Iowa with 20-24 inches of ice below all that snow. Heavy snow on top of ice blocks sunlight from reaching aquatic plants and stops them from producing oxygen. This combination can create low oxygen conditions that may lead to fish kills.

Winter fish kills are common on Iowa shallow lakes during long winters with lots of snow cover. Larger water bodies with greater depth hold more volume allowing them to tolerate long periods of ice and snow.

Some public lakes and private ponds have winter aeration systems that maintain open holes. Aeration systems do not inject oxygen into the water, they simply create open areas where gases can diffuse at the water/air interface and create refuge. These systems rely on the size of the open water area to maximize effectiveness. The DNR has aeration systems at ten natural lakes.

Dangerous and variable ice conditions early this winter prevented state officials from turning some systems on in December and January. A few systems were started and then turned off after large portions of the lake opened back up.

Mike Hawkins, Fisheries Biologist with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources in Spirit Lake, says, "Ice conditions through the end of January were treacherous. Open holes and weak areas prevented us from finding a safe time to start the aerators."

"The aerator at Clear Lake was started in December and then was shut down because it had caused a large part of the lake to open back up during windy and mild weather," says Scott Grummer, Fisheries Biologist at Clear Lake.

Hawkins and Grummer decided not to restart several of their aeration systems after ice finally became solid on most lakes in late January and early February. "Having open water so late in the season really shortens the time the lakes will stay ice covered, drastically reducing the chance of a winterkill," says Grummer. Hawkins adds, "We have a difficult decision to make in a very short window. We are always weighing safety against the risk of the coming season. High water, late ice-up, and very little snow cover earlier this year all added up to a low risk of winterkill."

DNR crews are responsible for putting up safety signs on the ice around the hole once the system is running. Hawkins says crews couldn't put signs up during the early part of the season because the ice was unsafe in parts of the lake.

Hawkins notes that turning the systems on later in the season usually isn't possible or advised. "We reach a point where ice thickness is too great to create a large hole. Turning the system on when oxygen levels get low can cause water to mix under the ice and create even worse conditions."

Grummer has four aeration systems running this winter. He says the value of those systems is greatly diminished right now. "The open holes created by the aerator at Rice Lake have shrunk substantially because of the extreme cold. Even with the aerator running, it is having very little impact on oxygen in the lake." On Friday, Feb. 22, the eleven aeration holes were down to just a few feet in size on this 1,000 acre lake.

Dissolved oxygen levels are monitored on natural lakes throughout northwest Iowa and so far levels are still safe in most locations. Natural lakes winterkill from time to time and is part of the natural cycle. "Fish species in these lakes have evolved under these conditions and their populations usually rebound very quickly. Some of the best fishing in these shallow natural lakes can be two to three years after a winterkill," says Hawkins. "Even with aeration, lakes still winterkill. Harsh Iowa winters can trump all our best efforts."

Media Contact: Mike Hawkins, Fisheries Biologist, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 712-336-1840 or Scott Grummer, Fisheries Biologist, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 641-357-3517.

Think spring: Trout stocking in northeast Iowa streams starts April 1

The popular trout stream stocking season starts in only five weeks on April 1. This year's trout stocking calendar, available on the DNR website at www.iowadnr.gov/trout, features the traditional favorite streams and one new location on Mill Creek in Bellevue. The Mill Creek stocking site will provide easy-access fishing in Felderman Park next to Bellevue State Park.

The DNR Trout Program offers Iowa anglers a variety of trout fishing opportunities, including announced catchable stockings, unannounced catchable stockings, fingerling stockings, wild trout, streams with restrictive regulations, easy universal access areas and remote streams with difficult access.

About 320,000 catchable-sized rainbow or brook trout and 25,000 fingerling brown trout will be stocked into hundreds of miles of northeast Iowa streams from April to October. Funding to support the trout stocking program comes from the sale of hunting and fishing licenses and trout fees. About 40,000 Iowans and 5,000 nonresidents go trout fishing in Iowa each year.

Iowa's trout streams, open year-round, meander through some of the most scenic areas of the state. Stocking information is available on the [DNR website](http://www.iowadnr.gov/trout), or from the 24-hour trout stocking hotline at 563-927-5736.

Media Contact: Dan Kirby, Fisheries Biologist, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 563-927-3276

Land donors to be honored during reception in Des Moines

DES MOINES – More than 5,700 acres of Iowa land in 35 counties with an estimated value of nearly \$6.2 million was permanently protected through donations for conservation.

The donors associated with over 40 donations of land or land value will be recognized during a ceremony on March 12, from 11:15 a.m. to 12:00 p.m., in the 1st floor rotunda, at the State Capitol, in Des Moines. Iowa Governor Kim Reynolds and Lieutenant Governor Adam Gregg are scheduled to attend.

Landowners who are in attendance will be honored individually for their donation. For more information about individual donations, visit the DNR website at www.iowadnr.gov/landdonors.

Media Contact: Alicia Plathe, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 515-725-8263.

Public input requested for Lewis and Clark Lake Duck Blind Program changes

YANKTON, SD - The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), Gavins Point Project is requesting public input for the existing Lewis and Clark Lake Duck Blind Program.

Lewis and Clark Lake is located near Yankton, South Dakota on the Missouri River. Over the life of the Duck Blind Program, multiple concerns and complaints have been received from many members of the public regarding the management the Duck Blind Program. Therefore, the Gavins Pont Project would like to provide an opportunity for the public to address any issues with the program and share what experiences they have had while hunting and recreating at Lewis and Clark Lake, in relation to the program's management of the lake's resources.

For more information about the program, including how to submit written comments, please visit: <http://www.nwo.usace.army.mil/gavinspoint> and click on the "Duck Blind Program" link.

The public is invited to a meeting scheduled on March 12, 2019 from 6:30-8:30 p.m. at the Yankton Fire Station, located at 201 W. 23rd St., Yankton, SD. Written comments must be received no later than March 31, 2019. If any changes to the program are made, they will be posted on the project's webpage at the above link.

Contact: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Gavins Point Project, (402) 667-2546 or GavinsPoint.NWO@usace.army.mil

Former hunters and potential hunters invited to Iowa City outdoor event

Area conservation groups and retailers are hosting a casual, family friendly event for former hunters and people with an interest in hunting, but never hunted, on March 13 at

the Iowa City Fin & Feature store. The event begins at 5 p.m.

Hunt Iowa Social will showcase opportunities in outdoor recreational pursuits, like shooting sports and fishing, help increase hunting knowledge or skills, and other ways to get involved. Booths will be set up with information on hunting and outdoor recreation and a variety of spring turkey hunting gear will be on display.

Attendees will receive a coupon for a free sandwich and drink during the event. Preregistration is encouraged and those who do will be entered into a drawing for prizes. Register online at <http://soo.gd/IWFHuntIowa>. Hunting licenses will be on sale and anyone who purchases a license at this event will receive an Iowa Wildlife Federation belt buckle, valued at \$25.

The event is made possible by the Iowa Wildlife Federation, Fin & Feather, the Iowa Department of Natural Resources and Pheasants Forever. Fin & Feather is located at 125 Hwy. 1 West, in Iowa City.

For more information, contact Joe Wilkinson, president, Iowa Wildlife Federation, at 319-541-4888.