



IOWA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Iowa DNR News

Conservation and Recreation

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Rice Lake use soars after lake renovation



Tree covered islands provide unique and high quality wildlife habitat at Rice Lake. Since the 2015 lake renovation, Rice Lake has had more use in one day than it did in an entire season pre-renovation. Photo courtesy of the Iowa DNR.

LAKE MILLS, Iowa - Trevis and Kris Erickson saw as business opportunity emerge 150 feet from the front of their new home.

The couple had moved to a place on a busy blacktop about halfway between Rice Lake and Silver Lake where they watched a steady stream of boats go back and forth between the lakes. Fishing had been on the uptick at Rice Lake since the lake

renovation in 2015 and anglers had to drive to either Clear Lake or Albert Lea, Minn. to get live bait.

Why wasn't there a local bait shop? Because before the renovation Rice Lake suffered from poor water quality, a fish population dominated by bullheads and little use.

To fix Rice Lake, the water was lowered before ice up, its fish population was eliminated and the outlet structure was replaced.

Once the lake filled, aquatic plants returned. A mix of yellow perch, bluegills, largemouth bass and walleyes were stocked. Ducks and geese found the high quality vegetation and were drawn like magnets.

Each year since, fishing got better, fish got bigger, ducks poured in and the word got out.

"We got tired of driving to Clear Lake or Albert Lea for bait," said Trevis Erickson. So, in 2017, they opened Tie 1 on Bait Shop on their acreage offering minnows and night crawlers in the summer and spikes, wax worms and minnows in the winter.

And area anglers are glad they did.

There's a logbook in the bait shop signed by anglers from surrounding towns, from Northwood and Buffalo Center, from Austin and Albert Lea, Minn., and from Des Moines.

There's an energy that's been here since the renovation: fishing, duck hunting, deer and pheasant hunting. Paddling and pleasure boating has increased and bird watchers converge during the spring and fall migration.

"It's attractive to a lot of people," said TJ Herrick, wildlife biologist with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources, who along with fisheries biologist Scott Grummer are responsible for managing Rice Lake and the surrounding wildlife area. And, Herrick said, the excellent water quality has been the driver. "We see a lot more people using the lake since the project and that was the goal," he said.

Today, Rice Lake can get more use in one day than it did in an entire season before it was fixed. The improved water clarity has benefited aquatic plants above and below the water surface to the point that even on the windiest day, there are no whitecaps. It's common to hear reports of 12-inch perch and an occasional walleye coming through the ice.

"Winter is big for Rice Lake," Erickson said.

Disappearing Lake

Rice Lake pulled a vanishing act in the early 1900s.

The lakebed was deemed too valuable to remain underwater by the State Highway Commission and was drained so it could be farmed. For nearly 15 years, area farmers struggled to till and crop the former lakebed.

In 1917, the commission referred to the draining of Rice Lake as a failure and wrote that it would be more valuable if the lake was returned and used as a breeding area for water birds. With 800 acres still under the state, they would need to reacquire 300-400 additional acres to secure the land that would be impacted by holding water. Engineers

began placing dikes between specific islands to return the 1,200-acre lake to the landscape.

Etcetera

- Rice Lake Wildlife Area covers about 2,000 acres, including the lake. The timber component consists of shagbark hickories and all of the oaks. That mast production supports a quality deer herd and the small, but ferocious, red squirrel. Red squirrels are about half the size of fox squirrels and are protected – no hunting allowed.
- Rice Lake was one of the original locations to receive starter flocks of Canada geese as part of the reintroduction program. Today, Canada geese numbers can reach and exceed 10,000.
- The western quarter of the lake is a waterfowl refuge, closed to all hunting from Sept. 1 through the end of the duck season.
- In the spring, tens of thousands of speckle-bellies and every species of waterfowl pass through Rice Lake, along with bald eagles, pelicans, cormorants and others on the migration route.
- Sandhill cranes are nesting here.
- Rice Lake Golf Course is a semi private 18 hold golf course on the southwest side of the lake, offering a restaurant and full clubhouse services.
- Rice Lake State Park, near the golf course, extends along the lake shore to the west. It has an open air shelter available for reservation, including a fireplace and picnic tables, a small swimming beach and a new courtesy dock.
- Including Joyce Slough, there are 32 islands on the complex.
- The last common loon in Iowa hatched at Rice Lake in 1898.
- Rice Lake was named after the acres of wild rice growing on the area. The wild rice is gone, but the name stuck.

Media Contact: TJ Herrick, Wildlife Biologist, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 641-829-3285.

New crayfish harvest regulation on Storm Lake

STORM LAKE, Iowa – To help reduce the spread of rusty crayfish to other waterbodies in Iowa, licensed bait dealers can no longer harvest any crayfish species from Storm Lake. Crayfish collected for bait from Storm Lake for personal use can only be used in Storm Lake and cannot be transported live from the lake.

Rusty crayfish are listed as a prohibited aquatic invasive species in Iowa. They are spreading to lakes, rivers, and streams in the Midwest, likely by anglers releasing them from bait buckets, hobbyists releasing them from aquariums and commercial harvest activities. Rusty crayfish are more aggressive and can displace native crayfish, can harm fish populations by eating their eggs and young and can graze on and eliminate aquatic plants.

Storm Lake (Buena Vista County) was confirmed to be infested with rusty crayfish in 2019. Before this occurrence, the abundance and distribution of rusty crayfish in Iowa was only known from small numbers of individuals collected in sections of the Maquoketa, Middle Iowa, Upper Cedar, and Upper Wapsipinicon rivers in eastern Iowa.

Media Contact: Kim Bogenschutz, Fisheries Bureau's Aquatic Invasive Species Program Coordinator, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 515-290-0540.

Nonresident annual permit for Lake Manawa and Waubonsie state parks available online September 18

Nonresidents now have another option to purchase the annual vehicle permit for Lake Manawa and Waubonsie state parks.

Starting September 18, 2019, customers will be able to go the state park reservation system at www.iowastateparks.reserveamerica.com and purchase the \$40 annual vehicle permit. A \$4 convenience fee will apply. The permit decal will be mailed to the customer the following business day. Customers may continue to purchase the annual permit and the second vehicle permit at Lake Manawa and Waubonsie state park offices.

For more information about the nonresident user fee, visit www.iowadnr.gov/parks or call Lake Manawa State Park at 712-366-0220 or Waubonsie State Park at 712-382-2786.

Bur Oak Blight affecting Iowa oak trees

DES MOINES - If your oak tree seems to be losing its leaves early, it may be due to a disease called Bur Oak Blight, caused by a fungus. This disease has been seen mostly in bur oak trees, but symptoms have also been found on swamp white oaks.

Leaves on affected trees start to brown between late July and early August, causing the leaves to fall or hang dead on the tree over the winter. Once a tree begins to show symptoms of this condition, it will continue to get worse each year.

Trees affected by Bur Oak Blight have experienced branches dying, and in some cases, entire trees have died. It's unknown whether Bur Oak Blight is the sole cause of tree death, or if it makes the oak more susceptible to other diseases or organisms.

Currently, there are limited ways to manage this disease. Bur Oak Blight often survives on dead leaves that hang on trees through the winter, so removing the leaves on the ground does not seem to minimize the impact of the fungus. Fungicide treatments have shown some promise, but this method is only recommended once a tree shows symptoms of the disease and not as a preventative treatment.

If you suspect a tree is suffering from Bur Oak Blight, get the problem correctly diagnosed before any management decisions are made. You can send samples to the Iowa State University Plant Diagnostic Clinic for testing.

Tree diseases targeting specific species is an important reason to have a diversity of trees in your yard or forested area. Diversity in your landscape can often reduce the overall impacts of species-specific diseases and insect problems. To explore options for what to plant in your yard, check out the DNR's Rethinking Maple publication.

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DNR investigates boat crash involving BWI, injures one

COUNCIL BLUFFS, Iowa -- On September 15, 2019, at approximately 7:30 pm at Lake Manawa, a boat and a personal watercraft (PWC) were leaving a 5 mph zone and gaining speed, going in the same direction, when the PWC made an abrupt right turn and collided with the front of the boat, according to witnesses.

The PWC was driven by Olum Sandel, 20, of Offutt Air Force Base, and the boat was operated by Rodney Smith, 23, of Plattsmouth, Neb.

Smith was taken to the Pottawattamie County Jail and charged with Boating While Intoxicated, first offense. Sandel was taken by the Council Bluffs Fire and Rescue to UNMC in Omaha where he is being treated for injuries sustained during the crash.

The crash is under investigation by the Iowa DNR Law Enforcement Bureau, and was assisted by the DNR Parks Bureau and the Iowa State Patrol during the initial investigation.

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