



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 6, 2021

- [Fish hatcheries busy netting walleye](#)
- [Spirit Lake Hatchery filling with northern pike](#)
- [Eager paddlers need to take extra precautions to stay safe](#)
- [Caves at Maquoketa Caves State Park open April 15: Tips to plan your visit](#)
- [Time to start planning to control plants in Iowa ponds](#)
- [Iowa's top collegiate athletes in shooting to converge at championship competition](#)
- [Campground hosts still needed for 2021 recreation season at five state parks](#)

## Fish hatcheries busy netting walleye

MORAVIA – The late night, annual walleye collection began last week at Rathbun and Storm lakes and earlier this week at the Iowa Great Lakes. Crews with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources Fisheries Bureau will set gillnets at night looking for walleyes ready to spawn.

Hatcheries will operate around the clock as local staff bring in the nightly haul well past midnight. As fish “ripen,” the eggs are removed from the walleyes and the fish are returned to the lake where they were caught to make room for the next night’s catch.

The goal is to collect enough fish to hatch 140.9 million walleye fry that will supply Iowa lakes and fish hatcheries.

All DNR offices, including fish hatcheries, are closed to the public until further notice due to COVID-19 precautions. Check out our [Iowa DNR Storm Lake Gillnetting 2019 video](#) to learn more about walleye collection efforts.

**Media Contact:** Jay Rudacille, Iowa DNR Warm and Coolwater Fish Culture Supervisor, 641-647-2406.

---

## Spirit Lake Hatchery filling with northern pike

SPIRIT LAKE - Crews with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources placed fyke nets in the outlets of the sloughs that flow into Big Spirit Lake on March 23 to start collecting northern pike. Northern pike spawn in sloughs and shallow vegetated areas around the Iowa Great Lakes prior to ice leaving the lakes.

A total of 207 adult northern pike were collected in three days. The fish were transported to the Spirit Lake Hatchery. The broodstock produced more than 1.7 million eggs which are currently being incubated in special jars that allow fresh water to flow over the eggs, supplying oxygen.

In less than two weeks, the fry will hatch and be stocked into Iowa's shallow lakes.

All DNR offices, including fish hatcheries, are closed to the public until further notice due to COVID-19 precautions.

**Media Contact:** Kim Hawkins, Spirit Lake Fish Hatchery Manager, 712-336-1840.

---

## Eager paddlers need to take extra precautions to stay safe

With recent warmer temperatures, restless paddlers are ready to put canoes and kayaks in the water. Early spring paddling can provide solitude, exercise and an opportunity to see amazing wildlife, but extra precautions are needed to stay safe.

The Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) recommends that paddlers wait for warmer weather to allow the water temperatures to rise slowly. It could be several weeks before water temperatures are ideal and safe as water and air temperatures continue to change.

“Air temperatures may feel warm in early spring, but the water is still dangerously cold and can be deadly to boaters,” said Todd Robertson, Iowa DNR River Programs Water Trails coordinator. “Cold water shock and hypothermia can set in quickly if you are not dressed and fall into the cold water, so dress for a swim.”

Stay away from strainers and sweepers—wood or branch piles—deadly hazards that can pull a paddler under or pin them underwater. These are usually found on outside river bends where currents are strongest.

Review these simple safety tips before you head out on the water.

- Check your canoe or kayak for any needed repairs or maintenance after being stored for several months. Look for holes and leaks, make sure all hatch lids fit snug and securely and check your paddle blades for signs of cracking or splitting.
- Wear your lifejacket at all times when underway. Dust off your life jacket and make sure all buckles and zippers work properly and look for holes and tears. Replace the life jacket if it has damage that cannot be repaired. Wear a life jacket at all times while on the water, regardless of your swimming ability. Not only do they help keep your head above water, they help maintain warmth.
- Dress for the water temperature, not the air temperature. Plan as if you were to be in the water at some point because “paddlers are just in between swims.” A wet suit or dry suit is a must. Do not wear cotton clothing—it fails to insulate when wet. Opt for synthetics or wool. Dress in layers so you can peel a layer off if overheated.

- Always bring along a dry bag with a complete set of extra clothes you can change into if you get wet, a first-aid kit and a protected cell phone or weather radio. Get out of wet, cold clothing as soon as possible. Pack plenty of water to stay hydrated.
- Let a friend or loved one know where you are going and when you are expected to return. It will be easier to find you if you need help.

**Media Contact:** Todd Robertson, Iowa DNR River Programs Outreach Coordinator at 515-243-3714.

---

## Caves at Maquoketa Caves State Park open April 15: Tips to plan your visit

Visitors to Maquoketa Caves State Park can fully explore the park's caves starting April 15, 2021 after being closed for more than a year due to COVID and winter bat hibernation. Located in eastern Iowa's Jackson County, Maquoketa Caves State Park is one of Iowa's most popular outdoor destinations, with the largest cave system in the state, gorgeous scenery and unique geological formations drawing thousands of visitors each year.

Because of the park's popularity and expected high crowds in the 2021 travel season, here are some tips and suggestions for planning your trip:

- **Parking is limited.** With less than 150 parking spots and as many as 1,500 people coming to the park on a summer weekend day, park staff recommend visiting mid-week or avoiding the peak window of 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. on weekends. Parking will only be allowed in designated spots for the safety of visitors and to protect natural areas. If parking spots are not available, please come back at a later time.
- **Same-day camping now an option.** Campers to Maquoketa Caves can now reserve as late as the day they plan to visit, with 100 percent of campsites reservable. The campground was recently renovated to offer more modern amenities. To find links for camping reservations, visit: [www.iowadnr.gov/maquoketacaves](http://www.iowadnr.gov/maquoketacaves)
- **Learn from interpreters.** In summer months, naturalists offer programming on a variety of outdoor topics. If entering the caves, upon your arrival plan on attending a short, required program about White Nosed Bat Syndrome and how you can prevent its spread.
- **In the time of COVID, be ready for enclosed stairways and boardwalks.** Exploring Maquoketa Caves involves a boardwalk system with enclosed railings in some places, along with several staircases and limited walkways. Please be mindful of other visitors by keeping social distances as much as possible. Wash your hands and stay home if you are sick.
- **Explore the stars of the show.** The main draws to Maquoketa Caves are its natural features and caves. Highlights include the **Natural Bridge**, a towering arch

50 feet above Raccoon Creek; **Balanced Rock**, a 17-ton rock formation that defies gravity; and **Dancehall Cave**; the largest cave in Iowa's park system, reaching more than 1,000 feet in length with a sidewalk and LED lights. Plus visit several unique caves and scenic views on the park's **six-mile long trail system**.

- **Make the most of your trip.** If the caves are busy, you can also visit a few nearby attractions to fully enjoy your trip. Explore the charming town of Maquoketa, or learn about nature at Jackson County's [Hurstville Interpretive Center](#). Three other state parks are within a 30-45 minute drive: [Bellevue State Park](#) offers breathtaking views of the Mississippi River; [Mines of Spain State Recreation Area](#) features historic sites and hiking; and [Wapsipinicon State Park](#) near Anamosa, showcases the historic 1800s-era Hale Bridge and walking path.

Enjoy Maquoketa Caves State Park this summer. Find maps, directions, amenities and reservation links at: [www.iowadnr.gov/maquoketacaves](http://www.iowadnr.gov/maquoketacaves)

---

## Time to start planning to control plants in Iowa ponds

A healthy pond needs aquatic plants, but too many plants can limit the pond's use and cause imbalances in the fish population. If you had problems using your pond last year because of aquatic plant growth, you could have similar problems this year.

In an existing pond, mechanical and chemical control methods are the best options for immediate control. They usually work best if you start early, when plant growth is not at its maximum level. If you wait until growths are thick, control will be difficult, take longer, and chemical control could cause water quality issues that harm fish.

Mechanical methods include bottom blanketing, shading, removal and lowering water levels. Temporarily blanket the bottom of a private pond and leave it in place for 30 days early in the season to limit plant growth in fishing or swimming areas. Use weighted commercial weed barrier products or thick black plastic (punctured to allow gases to escape).

To shade a pond, apply a pond dye in April, before most plants are actively growing, to reduce the amount of light needed for plants to grow. This works best in ponds with a small watershed. Many blue and black pond dye products are available for pond beautification; Aquashade® or Admiral®, both blue dyes, are the only products labeled by the EPA to limit plant growth. Re-apply the product at a reduced rate throughout the spring and summer since inflowing water can dilute it and ultra-violet light can decompose it.

Removal is a low-cost way to take out plants from high-use areas. It can be done by hand or with special rakes and cutters (make your own or buy from retail outlets).

Lowering water levels is another way to control aquatic plants. Let water out of the pond this spring (or winter) to expose aquatic plants to drying (or freezing) conditions to limit their growth after water is allowed to refill the pond.

Herbicides will control pond plants chemically, but you may need to reapply during the summer to get season-long control. Follow these five steps when you apply any herbicide: 1) correctly identify the plant you want to control; 2) measure the area you are going to treat (surface area and average depth); 3) read the herbicide label to determine the correct timing and amount to apply; 4) identify possible restrictions on uses of the water (e.g., irrigation or watering animals) and 5) apply according to label directions. Most aquatic herbicides work best if applied on a calm, sunny morning.

Find more information on aquatic plants in ponds on the DNR website at [www.iowadnr.gov/ponds](http://www.iowadnr.gov/ponds).

**Media Contact:** Darcy Cashatt, Fisheries Technician, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 641-647-2406.

---

## Iowa's top collegiate athletes in shooting to converge at championship competition

Over the next two weeks, more than 150 athletes from 15 Iowa colleges and universities will participate in the 2021 Iowa Scholastic Clay Target Program (SCTP) Collegiate Championships in Skeet, Sporting Clays and Trap. Many of these athletes have been shooting in the SCTP since middle school or high school and have been continued competing at the collegiate level.

Over the past five years, collegiate shooting sports programs in Iowa has grown from four to 21 teams, including community colleges and four-year universities, mirroring the increase in participation seen in the Iowa middle school and high school teams, which has grown from 1,400 athletes to more than 4,200 athletes since 2011.

"The continued growth of the Scholastic Clay Target Program in Iowa's colleges and universities benefits both Iowa's high school athletes and the colleges," said Chris Van Gorp, shooting sports coordinator for the Iowa Department of Natural Resources. "Iowa has a history of cultivating talented shooting sports athletes and these collegiate programs are providing an opportunity for them to continue competing past high school."

The day-long events will take place in mid-April at two locations:

- April 9-10: Collegiate Skeet and Sporting Clays, Mahaska County Ikes, Oskaloosa
- April 17: Collegiate Trap Championship, The Stockdale Gun Club, Ackley

The Scholastic Clay Target Program is the largest, fastest growing, and exciting youth clay target program in the US. Student athletes from elementary through high school and college have the opportunity to compete in sports such as trap, skeet, and sporting clays, as well as Olympic disciplines like bunker trap and international skeet.

"The SCTP is a youth development program, first and foremost and we do this through the shooting sports and competitive shooting," Van Gorp said. The SCTP's mission is to help kids reach their highest potential in becoming the best athletes and young adults

they can be. For more information on the Scholastic Clay Target Program in Iowa, contact Van Gorp at 515-313-8048 or [chris.vangorp@dnr.iowa.gov](mailto:chris.vangorp@dnr.iowa.gov).

**Media Contact:** Chris Van Gorp, DNR Shooting Sports Coordinator, (515) 313-8048 or [Chris.Vangorp@dnr.iowa.gov](mailto:Chris.Vangorp@dnr.iowa.gov).

---

## Campground hosts still needed for 2021 recreation season at five state parks

The Iowa DNR is seeking people who enjoy the outdoors, camping and meeting new people, to consider becoming volunteer campground hosts for the upcoming recreation season at five state parks and forests:

- Beeds Lake
- Clear Lake
- Nine Eagles
- Springbrook
- Stephens State Forest

Volunteer campground hosts live in state parks from one to five months assisting DNR staff with light maintenance duties, checking in campers, and being a resource for visitors enjoying state parks and forests.

Campground hosts are provided a free campsite while they are actively hosting during the camping season. Hosts volunteer 20 – 40 hours per week, including weekends and holidays, while living on site in their own camper.

General duties include greeting visitors, assisting campers checking in and with reservations, cleaning bathrooms, light maintenance and administrative duties, acting as a liaison between campers and DNR staff and answering questions and disseminating information to campers.

Information about campgrounds and state parks is available online at [www.iowadnr.gov/stateparks](http://www.iowadnr.gov/stateparks). To discuss the host position, contact the state park directly, or call 515-443-2533.