



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 27, 2021

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## Iowa's cool water fish hatcheries filled to capacity

The Iowa Department of Natural Resources' spring fish spawning season is over and Iowa's cool water fish hatcheries at Fairport, Rathbun, and Spirit Lake are filled to capacity.

"Our goal was to collect 1,858 quarts of walleye eggs to produce 149.9 million walleye fry that we can stock in Iowa lakes or raise to a larger size in hatcheries before being released," said Jay Rudacille, DNR warm and cool water fish culture supervisor.

Walleyes were caught at East and West Okoboji lakes, Rathbun Lake, Spirit Lake, and Storm Lake from April 3-12. Netting crews collected enough walleyes to produce 1,093 quarts of eggs at Spirit Lake Fish Hatchery, 533 quarts at Rathbun Fish Hatchery, and 361 quarts at the Storm Lake satellite hatchery.

"In total, 1,987 quarts of walleye eggs are being incubated," Rudacille said. "A true team effort allowed us to not only achieve our goal, but exceed it by 129 quarts of eggs."

Netting operations returned to Storm Lake Hatchery this year. "It had been a couple years since we netted fish at Storm Lake with the hatchery closed due to the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020," said Ben Wallace, Black Hawk District fisheries biologist. "We were happy to see high catch rates and quality size fish still there."

While the sole focus at Fairport and Rathbun hatcheries in the spring is collecting and producing walleye, crews at Spirit Lake collect three species of cool water fish: muskellunge, northern pike and walleyes. DNR personnel collected 173 muskies to provide 1.5 million eggs for hatching to raise fish to 12 inches, as well as 207 northern pike that produced almost 850,000 fry to stock in Iowa's shallow lakes.

"Outdoor recreation and fishing hit unprecedented levels last year during the pandemic," said Mike Hawkins, Spirit Lake District fisheries biologist. "Our spring hatchery operations are a key part of maintaining healthy lakes and fisheries for all Iowans as use increases."

Iowa is one of the top producers of walleye fry (newly hatched fish) in the United States, second only to Minnesota. While the majority of walleyes are stocked as fry, some are

cultured in Iowa DNR hatcheries and stocked at different sizes. More than 1.2 million two-inch walleyes are expected to be stocked into lakes, rivers, and streams across the state this summer. Larger 6- 9-inch fingerlings (more than 311,000) will be stocked in lakes later this fall.

With little natural reproduction, Iowa's walleye populations rely heavily upon stockings. Walleyes are stocked throughout Iowa into natural lakes, interior rivers, flood control reservoirs and selected larger man-made lakes.

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## Backyard bird feeders encouraged to keep those feeders clean

Each year, especially during late winter, the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) receives reports of sick or dead birds at feeder locations, particularly in the southern part of the state. Unsanitary conditions at bird feeders can lead to the spread of several diseases amongst birds that frequent these feeders.

Aspergillosis, a disease caused by a fungus which often grows in contaminated feed or leaf litter, is one of the main causes of sick and/or dying birds at feeders. During midwinter warm-ups, fungus quickly grows. Birds feeding on contaminated grain often become sick and die.

Salmonellosis, another disease contracted at feeders, is caused by the salmonella bacteria. Western states had many cases of salmonella outbreaks during winter 2020-2021 that resulted in die offs of large numbers of pine siskins.

"Iowa did not experience the same issues with salmonella, but staying vigilant and keeping feeders and bird baths clean is important," said Anna Buckardt Thomas, avian ecologist with the Iowa DNR. "This disease is transmitted mostly by contamination of bird droppings, frequently those found in the birds' feed or water. It can also spread when one bird comes into direct contact with another." Birds suffering from this disease can appear weak, listless, and fluffed-up, and might suffer convulsions before they die.

"House finch disease," or conjunctivitis, is a disease affecting finches that causes swelling of the eye tissue but is not always fatal. While this disease was much more prevalent 20 years ago, it still shows up in finches at feeders from time to time. This disease particularly affects the respiratory system and is caused by the bacterium, mycoplasma gallisepticum, which poses no threat to humans. As the name suggests, the disease mostly affects house finches, but there have been a few documented cases of the disease in American goldfinch, as well. Since birds concentrate at bird feeders, the risk of disease spread can especially increase during times when large numbers of this species are sharing the same feeding sites. Adding extra feeders to the yard can slow the spread of this disease by eliminating overcrowding.

The good news about all three of these diseases is that they are largely preventable.

“Practicing good hygiene at feeder stations is the key. Clean bird feeders and waterers with a 10 percent bleach solution about once each month and make sure the feeder is dry before refilling it with seed,” Buckardt Thomas said. Of equal importance is cleaning up spilled seed and bird droppings below feeders.

“Be sure to wear rubber gloves while cleaning the feeders, since humans can contract some diseases, such as those caused by some salmonella bacteria, from affected feeders or sick birds,” she said.

“If people do find sick birds at their feeders they should take down their feeders for at least two weeks to help stop the spread of disease and contact the DNR,” she said.

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## Five boating tips to keep waters clean all season long

Iowa boat owners can help to protect the environment by following five simple tips all summer long.

- Take time to prepare your boat’s shrink wrap for recycling by removing vents, strapping or zippers. Only the plastic film can be recycled. Many shrink wrap recycling programs today are offered at the local level, so if your marina does not recycle, ask your county government. Some boaters have found that by carefully removing the wrap it can be reused for a second season.
- If you trailer your boat to different waterways each summer, leave the uninvited aquatic hitchhikers at home by following shrink wrap “Clean, Drain, Dry,” ensuring your boat, trailer and motor are cleaned thoroughly (including any tackle or watersports gear) and allowed to dry completely before splashing in a different body of water.
- The earth may be 71 percent water, but it’s no place for trash. Always have a trash receptacle aboard, and when underway ensure nothing goes overboard. (A waste can with a closable lid helps.) A second receptacle for recyclables also helps and makes cleanup easier at the end of the boating day.
- Prevent a spill by refueling your boat with care. Always have an absorbent pad, fuel nozzle absorbent “donut,” or “bib” (to soak up back splashes) when you pump. Actively listen to fuel being dispensed into the fuel nozzle receptacle. Slow down the dispensing pump as fuel reaches the top of the tank – usually when you start to hear bubbling or gurgling noises rising from the fuel filler tube. Refuel portable tanks ashore.
- Help keep discarded fishing line and soft baits out of the water by building a fishing line recycling bin and placing it in your community. To learn how, go to [BoatUS.org/Monofilament](https://www.boatus.org/Monofilament).

