



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Aug. 3, 2021

- [With its prairie established, Wapsi Flats Wildlife Area is starting to attract attention](#)
- [Late summer underwater aquatic plant control for ponds](#)

## With its prairie established, Wapsi Flats Wildlife Area is starting to attract attention



*The bright yellow of gray headed cone flowers is covering a large portion of the Wapsi Flats Wildlife Area. The young prairie is starting to establish itself after a few years of battling floods. Photo courtesy of the Iowa DNR.*

Heading north on the Asherton Avenue just before the Howard-Chickasaw County line, is a mile-long prairie covered with yellow flowers. The prairie replaced the "Swamp Farm," as it was referred to by its former owner due to its almost constant wetness, and is now the Wapsi Flats Wildlife Area.

"It's still a work in progress," said Jason Auel, wildlife biologist with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR). "We've had issues with flooding, which has delayed some of the things we want to do, like getting our prairie established, but this year has been good and it should help the prairie survive flooding in the future."

The area was sold to the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation in 2011 and then to the state in 2012. It has grown to 525 acres on two parcels providing hunting and wildlife watching opportunities as well as an easy hike on its fairly flat terrain. Auel is looking to install seven wetlands totaling about 40 acres in the next few years that, once added, will increase the diversity of wildlife to include waterfowl and likely expand the reptiles and amphibians on the area.

"There's not many wetlands around here so it will fill a need," he said. "It will be a one stop shop for birdwatching and hunting opportunities."

It's fairly easy to see where the wetlands will be as they are the only green grassy areas inside the bright yellow field of gray headed coneflower, a native prairie flower that is currently dominating Wapsi Flats. Lead plant is showing up which is a good indicator that you've got a quality prairie developing. Indian grass is also visible as is wild bergamot.

Auel's staff planted a three-acre grove of cedar trees between two of the food plots in 2014 to provide thermal protection and easy access to food for pheasants during the winter. A local producer partners with the DNR to install and manage the 25 acres of food plots that will provide wildlife critical food and cover for winter survival. He is allowed to hay certain areas in exchange for the food plot work.

"It's been a good partnership," Auel said.

Wapsi Flats has two sunflower fields that have been very popular. A four-acre north plot, that's about a quarter mile walk from the north road and a similar sized south plot that is not as visible and is a bit longer of a hike.

A pair of sandhill cranes were wandering through the shorter grasses on the south parcel. The southern parcel covers 116-acres of the 525 and is in its first year of a brome alfalfa mix. A small grove of trees will be thinned, leaving a few buckeyes standing, which is a unique tree species for the area. Pheasants Forever provided some funding to help with the acquisition of the 116-acre parcel.

Walking through the area on the late July morning, a young dickcissel calls while clinging tightly to a tall big bluestem as it bounces with the wind. Monarch butterflies flutter from flower to flower and dragonflies are hunting near the dry wetland basins.

The young prairie is home to the eastern meadowlarks, bobolinks, northern harriers, grasshopper sparrows, partridge and wild turkey. Three young pheasants flush to the safety of the sunflower field. Three more flush to the safety of the corn food plot. Chickasaw County has had a history as a place to go for quality pheasant hunting.

Nonresidents will call to ask about Wapsi Flats when planning their pheasant hunt and looking for a place to stop on their way to northwest Iowa. "You have to know it's here because you're not going to stumble across it," Auel said. "If you come during the week, you might have it to yourself."

While the area is overwhelmingly prairie, the treelined Wapsipinicon River corridor is nearby and is the source for the deer and turkey found here. "It has surprisingly good turkey hunting," he said.

Wapsi Flats is 15-20 miles from Charles City, New Hampton and Osage. The dead-end road bordering it to the north is on the Howard-Chickasaw County line. Floyd County is one mile to the west. The Chickasaw County Conservation Board has a 22-acre area connecting the south side of the main section of Wapsi Flats to the 116-acre south parcel.

**Media Contact:** Jason Auel, Wildlife Biologist, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 319-213-2815.

---

## Late summer underwater aquatic plant control for ponds

A healthy pond needs aquatic plants, but too many can upset a fishing pond's balance and become a nuisance. Many pond owners struggle with how to control the amount of aquatic plants, without completely removing all of them, so they can enjoy their pond.

Pond owners can use herbicides to kill underwater plants, but their growing season is almost over by August.

Pond rakes or cutters, although more labor intensive, are perfect this time of year to control aquatic plants in small areas to create fishing lanes, swimming areas and dock access.

Pond rakes tear plants from the bottom and let you remove them from near shore or around docks. Attach a float to the rake to let it skim and remove plants and moss or algae from the surface.

A cutter will sink to the bottom and cut the plant stems as it is dragged back, allowing the plants to float to the top. The pond plants are often carried away by the wind or you can pick them up with a floating rake.

Use a rope attached to a long-handled rake or cutter that you can throw and pull back. You can use these handy tools for many years, and they cost less than a gallon of some aquatic herbicides. Local hardware or pool stores may carry these, or try an online search for "pond rake or cutter."

A few tips to remember:

- Many plants spread by fragmentation, so if growth is not throughout the pond, do not use these methods.
- Once out of the water, let the plants dry out before moving them too far. This will greatly lighten your load.
- Obey State Law. Don't haul the plants off your property; you cannot transport aquatic vegetation in Iowa. Once out of the water, leave the plants onshore to dry and compost or move dried plants to your garden where they make excellent mulch.
- Lakeshore property owners on a public lake can physically remove a 15 foot wide path of vegetation for navigation to the main lake without a permit; you cannot use

herbicides to remove the aquatic plants in a publicly-owned lake. Contact the DNR fisheries office in your area if you have questions.

Learn more about aquatic plants in ponds at [www.iowadnr.gov/pondplants](http://www.iowadnr.gov/pondplants).

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