



IOWA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Iowa DNR News

Conservation and Recreation

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Little Swan Lake restoration is a true success story



Restoration work began in 2016, and while the water level in the lake was held low, it wasn't until the back to back drought years of 2020 and 2021, that vegetation finally got established to move the lake into a clear water state. Photo courtesy of the Iowa DNR.

The Little Swan Lake/Christopherson Slough wetland complex is a mix of remnant and restored prairie, a high-quality shallow lake, a large marsh, restored wetlands, oak savanna and oak timber covering more than 2,100 acres just north of the town of Superior in eastern Dickinson County.

The centerpiece of the area is the 371-acre Little Swan Lake that is experiencing its best water quality in more than a generation due to a restoration project combined with a well-timed drought.

The project was initiated in 2015 after the old weir was failing. "While the project was initiated to fix the weir, we saw an opportunity to reach out to the private landowners and our conservation partners to explore, cooperatively, renovating the lake," said Chris LaRue, wildlife biologist with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources.

Work began in 2016, but several consecutive wet years limited the progress. The water level in the lake was held low and combined with the back to back drought years of 2020 and 2021, the vegetation finally got established to move the lake into a clear water state.

“We kept the water level down trying to get the aquatic plants established then Mother Nature helped out with the drought and we got it done,” LaRue said. “It was hard to envision Little Swan Lake with clear water. This is the first time in my career (1996) that you can see the lake bottom and significant water quality improvements. This is a pretty big deal.”

Little Swan Lake outlets into a marsh, then the 90-acre Christopherson Slough, then flows north into Minnesota before entering the West Fork of the Des Moines River. To maintain the water quality, it was necessary to protect the aquatic plants, so the project included a large rock fish barrier with tube system to prevent common carp from entering the lake. Common carp are a fish species that uproot aquatic plants and stir nutrients from the lake sediment leading to poor water quality.

After the lake renovation, it was restocked with yellow perch, northern pike, and other native species in coordination with Mike Hawkins, district fisheries biologist.

The complex had supported migratory birds and served as a critical stopover during the migration, but use had declined significantly due to poor water quality and habitat. After the renovation, waterfowl and nongame birds returned, and the area is home to three nesting pairs of trumpeter swans. Last year, Little Swan hosted more than 50 swans during the migration which brought a lot of attention to the lake.

LaRue said a big reason that the project came together was the internal coordination between the Iowa Lake Restoration Program and local staff from the Fisheries and Wildlife Bureaus, and participation from the neighboring landowners.

“This restoration could not have been possible without all of the partners,” LaRue said. “This was a team effort made possible by Ducks Unlimited, the Dickinson County Water Quality Commission, the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship, Natural Resources Conservation Service, private donors, our staff and funding from the North American Wetland Conservation Act and Iowa Lake Restoration Program.”

And the work isn't done.

LaRue is planning additional bank stabilization improvements in select areas on the state shoreline in the future with targeted tree removal to emphasize the oaks and to enhance sunlight on the slopes for other grasses and critical vegetation.

Other plans include future timber improvement at Christopherson Slough through buckthorn removal, which will allow sunlight to hit the ground and favor oaks and oak regeneration.

Unique wildlife and plants

Crews from the Multiple Species Inventory and Monitoring program in the Iowa DNR's Wildlife Diversity Program have surveyed the complex, most recently in 2021, recording the different wildlife species that calls the area home.

It has documented a number of species considered threatened or in need of conservation including the state threatened Henslow's sparrow, and state endangered northern harrier. The Poweshiek skipperling and black terns have been confirmed at the complex, along with Blanchard's cricket frog, bobolink, broad-winged hawk and bald eagles.

"It has it all from a wildlife perspective. Waterfowl, deer, pheasants, grassland birds, butterflies in the prairie and amphibians and reptiles," LaRue said.

Remnant prairie has been found on the dry ridges on the eastern portion of the complex and has unique rolling hill topography versus flatter landscape in pothole area. Sage, butterfly milkweed, yarrow, gray-headed coneflower, wild bergamot, and leadplant are visible.

Some less common plants on the complex include shining willow, wild rice and the federally threatened prairie bush clover.

LaRue said they used prescribed fires on three different prairie sections this season to keep the brush down and to improve the habitat. He said they also use targeted and limited grazing management and work with a tenant who conducts some of the management activities, including installing food plots and noxious weed control.

Etcetera

- Little Swan Lake has a boat ramp on the north end and a large culvert under county road N16 connecting the lake to the West Bay. Kayakers and small

motorboats can pass through the culvert when water levels allow – just be sure to trim up the motor. Little Swan is currently at crest.

- The complex supports paddling, a productive fishery, is popular for duck and pheasant hunters. Steel shot is required for hunting all species except for deer and turkey.
- After spending a day enjoying Little Swan Lake, stop in the Softtail Saloon on Hwy. 4, in Superior, for a burger or Little Swan Lake Winery, south of the lake.

Media Contact: Chris LaRue, Wildlife Biologist, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 712-330-4543.

Management planned for Eurasian watermilfoil found at Lost Island Lake

RUTHVEN – The Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) confirmed Eurasian watermilfoil is growing at four sites along the west and southwest side of Lost Island Lake, located three miles north of Ruthven in Palo Alto County.

The Iowa DNR Aquatic Plant Management team monitors 35 sites at Lost Island Lake each year. “The team spent several hours surveying the extent of the Eurasian watermilfoil, developed an emergency action plan, and treated 14.5 acres with an aquatic herbicide approved for use on lakes on July 27,” said Michael Hawkins, Iowa DNR fisheries biologist.

Eurasian watermilfoil, an invasive rooted aquatic plant native to parts of Europe and Asia, can spread quickly and outcompete beneficial native plants. It reproduces by fragmentation, which means small pieces of it grow into new plants and form thick beds.

The DNR will closely monitor Lost Island Lake this summer and fall and work with the community to develop a long-term management plan to treat the plant as needed.

Lost Island Lake is an important 1,162-acre natural lake in Palo Alto and Clay counties. The lake was removed from the State's impaired waters list in 2018 after extensive restoration efforts by the community and DNR in the early 2010s. The lake's water

quality, habitat, and fish and wildlife resources have all been improving. Aggressive action to treat Eurasian watermilfoil will be important to help maintain ecological health.

“Boaters and anglers can unintentionally spread aquatic invasive species if they do not take the proper precautions - clean, drain, dry - after each time out on the water,” said Kim Bogenschutz, the DNR’s aquatic invasive species program coordinator.

- CLEAN any plants, animals or mud from the boat and equipment before you leave a water body.
- DRAIN water from all equipment (motor, live well, bilge, transom well, bait bucket) before you leave a water body.
- DRY anything that comes into contact with water (boats, trailers, equipment, boots, clothing, dogs). Before you move to another waterbody either: Spray your boat and trailer with hot, high-pressure water; or Dry your boat and equipment for at least 5 days.
- Never release plants, fish or animals into a water body unless they came out of that water body and empty unwanted bait in the trash.

It is illegal to possess or transport prohibited aquatic invasive species, such as Eurasian watermilfoil in Iowa. Boaters must also drain all water from boats and equipment before leaving a water access and must keep drain plugs removed or opened during transport.

Find more information about aquatic invasive species and a list of infested waters in the 2022 Iowa Fishing Regulations booklet or on the DNR’s website at www.iowadnr.gov/ais.

Media Contacts: Mike Hawkins, Spirit Lake Fish Hatchery at 712-336-1840 or Jason Euchner, Boone Wildlife Research Station at 515-432-2823.

Learn to Hunt program opens registration for youth waterfowl workshop

DES MOINES - The Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is offering a program to teach skills needed to hunt, field dress and cook waterfowl to youth who have little to no waterfowl hunting experience on Aug. 27, at the Olofson Shooting Range, near Polk City.

The workshop will feature knowledge and skills building sessions with hands-on learning as well as a live-fire wingshooting.

“For those interested in the challenge of waterfowl hunting as a means of sourcing their own protein, this program provides the opportunity to learn the skills and knowledge it takes to do it all yourself,” said Jamie Cook, program coordinator with the Iowa DNR.

Participants will learn basic strategies for hunting waterfowl such as proper equipment, where to hunt, safe shooting practices, and how to field dress, prepare and cook ducks and geese. The wingshooting session will provide lessons on shooting techniques and range time for those looking to improve their shooting skills.

The course runs from 2 to 7 p.m., and is designed for participants 8 years of age and older. The cost is \$35 for the course and includes a meal and a youth membership to Delta Waterfowl. The event will be held at Olofson Shooting Range, near Polk City. Space is limited so early registration is encouraged. Youth must be accompanied by a parent or legal guardian.

For more information, or to begin the registration process, go to <https://tinyurl.com/bdckdvhj>

The program is provided through a partnership with the Iowa DNR and Delta Waterfowl. It is part of a national effort to recruit, retain and reactivate hunters due to the overall decline in hunting and outdoor recreation.

Media Contact: Jamie Cook, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 515-350-8091.

Heytman’s Landing boat ramp on Mississippi River closed until Sept. 23

LANSING – The Heytman’s Landing boat ramp, south of Lansing, on Pool 9 of the Mississippi River is closed until Sept. 23 to replace the railroad bridge that spans the boat channel.

Boaters are encouraged to seek other ramps in the area, including Village Creek in Lansing and New Albin Army Road, north of Lansing. There are many ramps on the Wisconsin side of the river. The Big Slough and Winneshiek Slough landings are directly

across the Lansing Bridge in Wisconsin. Blackhawk Park area has multiple ramps and Dairyland Power access south of Genoa has plenty of parking.

The Iowa DNR is set to begin dredging the boat access channel once the railroad construction project is completed.

Media Contact: Karen Osterkamp, Fisheries Biologist, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 563-252-1156.

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 reduce 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 cut 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.

Media Contact: Jason Euchner, Fisheries Biologist, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 515-230-4789.

Counting turkeys

The Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is looking for help with its annual wild turkey production survey. During the months of July and August wild turkey sightings are recorded to estimate this year's nesting rates and nest success.

Participation is easy – just note the date and county in which the turkey was seen, if it was an adult female or adult male – males have beards on their breast – and if and how many poults (baby turkeys) were present. The survey is available online at <https://www.iowadnr.gov/Hunting/Turkey-Hunting/Wild-Turkey-Survey>.

Annual population surveys conducted by the DNR are an important component of managing the wild turkey. Turkey populations can fluctuate annually across all regions of the state. All participation is appreciated.

MEDIA CONTACT: Jim Coffey, Forest Wildlife Biologist, Wildlife Bureau, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 641-774-2958.

