



IOWA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Iowa DNR News

Conservation and Recreation

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Habitat work continues on prairie, timber at Miami Lake Wildlife Area



A fifteen-acre parcel of old fescue pasture at Miami Lake Wildlife Area was seeded to prairie in June, and that young prairie is now starting to show itself. Although the plants are small, they can be identified – bergamot, mountain mint, big bluestem, rattlesnake master. A turkey brood was seen using it in August. Photo courtesy of the Iowa DNR.

Lovilia, Iowa - Month by month, year by year, change is coming to Miami Lake Wildlife Area.

The work to improve and reclaim the grasslands and prairie, and encourage the oaks and hickories in the timber will ultimately benefit wildlife and improve the water quality in the 137-acre lake.

“We’ve been working on it for the past five years, and probably have another three to go, but we’re starting to see the fruits of our labor,” said Greg Schmitt, wildlife technician with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Rathbun Wildlife Unit.

Staff with the Iowa DNR along with the local cooperators have been removing brush to create a larger grassland complex. Schmitt said the local cooperator is part of the beginning farmer program and has been a significant help with the tree removal to re-establish the grassland. The Miami Lake area had a significant amount of autumn olive, honeysuckle and gray dogwood that required cutting and grinding.

“He’s really helped us along, reclaiming grasslands that had been lost to trees,” he said. “It was laden with brush and invasives, but we’re getting ahead of it.”

A late spring use of prescribed fire targeted the invasive reed canary grass and what returned to the site was common milkweed, which benefits pollinators in general and monarch butterflies in particular.

Fifteen acres of old fescue pasture was sprayed last fall and again this spring, then followed up with prescribed fire. In June, it was seeded to prairie from the DNR’s Prairie Resource Center that is now starting to show itself and although the plants are small, they can be identified – bergamot, mountain mint, big bluestem, rattlesnake master. Schmitt discovered a turkey brood using it when he showed up to mow it in August.

“In about three years, this area is really going to look different,” he said.

Looking ahead, Schmitt pointed to a valley filled with invasive black locust that will be cut and sprayed and transitioned into prairie.

“The local shooting sports team will pull out the trees and cut and split the logs into firewood for sale in the campground as a fundraiser for their team,” he said.

Keeping the area in prairie requires a commitment to regular management to prevent brush and trees from encroaching and that means spraying, grinding, cutting, pulling and fire. But not all of the management here is intended to remove trees.

With the bulk of the Miami Lake Wildlife Area considered timber, Schmitt said they are also focusing on improvements to benefit the oaks, hickories and other hardwoods in the existing timber. Between 2017-2021, all 400 woodland acres surrounding the lake were treated with some sort of forest management, most of which was understory removal and crop tree release to improve mast production and promote oak seedling expansion. He said they are working to expand the oaks and hickories through new plantings west of the marsh and in a few of the fields.

The prairie and timber are one piece of the larger recreation complex.

The area also includes a park and campground managed by the Monroe County Conservation Board offering cabin rentals, campsites with varying amenities and a nature center.

A number of sediment ponds have been placed at strategic locations to protect the water quality of the lake and have been stocked with fish. Use the hunting atlas online at www.iowadnr.gov/hunting for an overhead view of Miami Lake to see the locations of these ponds.

History of diverse wildlife community

Miami Lake Wildlife Area has hosted the Multiple Species Inventory and Monitoring team eight times since 2011. The team, which is part of the Wildlife Diversity Program, surveys areas for birds, mammals, reptiles, amphibians, odonates and butterflies. At Miami Lake, the team found a number of species in need of conservation, including the threatened Henslow's sparrow, state endangered red-shouldered hawks, and species considered of special concern including the wild indigo duskywing, zabulon skipper and the southern flying squirrel.

Media Contact: Greg Schmidt, Wildlife Technician, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, Rathbun Unit, 641-203-6185, Heath Van Waus, Wildlife Biologist, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, Rathbun Unit, 641-203-6179.

Iowa DNR accepting comments on proposed walleye length limit changes on Lake Rathbun

MORAVIA - The Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is accepting comments on proposed changes to walleye length limits on Lake Rathbun, through Sept. 29.

The DNR is proposing a 15-inch minimum length limit on all walleye captured from Rathbun Lake. These changes will start January 1, 2023. All walleyes measuring less than 15 inches must be immediately released. Anglers can keep five walleyes per day. This regulation will not apply to the Chariton River below Rathbun Dam.

Currently, there is no length regulation on walleyes at Rathbun Lake.

Comments on the proposed length limit change may be submitted through September 29 via email to fisheries@dnr.iowa.gov, or by mail to Joe Larscheid, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, Wallace State Office Building, 502 East Ninth Street, Des Moines, Iowa, 50319-0034.

The DNR has scheduled a listening session from 6 to 8 p.m., Sept. 29, at the Rathbun Fish Hatchery, 15053 Hatchery Place, Moravia. Attendees will be asked to give their names for the record and to confine their remarks to the content of the proposed length limit change.

Any person attending these sessions and has special requirements such as those related to mobility or hearing impairments should contact the DNR or ADA Coordinator at 515-725-8200, Relay Iowa TTY Service 800-735-7942, or Webmaster@dnr.iowa.gov, and advise of specific needs.

Lend a hand in a state park at Statewide Volunteer Day on Sept. 24

Iowans are invited to lend a hand at the Department of Natural Resources' sixth annual Statewide Volunteer Day on Sept. 24. Several parks across the state will be hosting volunteer events to help spruce up trails, buildings and other park amenities.

"Iowa state parks are beloved places for many Iowans, and we greatly appreciate the help volunteers provide," said Sherry Arntzen, chief of Iowa Parks, Forests and Preserves.

Clean-up efforts at Statewide Volunteer Day will be unique for each park and may include litter pick-up, staining or painting buildings, planting trees, clearing trails and more.

Citizens interested in volunteering can learn more at www.iowadnr.gov/volunteer. If weather looks inclement, volunteers should contact the individual park office in case changes to date, time or meeting location for the event occur.

Aggressive treatment planned for Eurasian watermilfoil found in the Iowa Great Lakes

SPIRIT LAKE - The Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) will start treating East Okoboji, Upper Gar, Lake Minnewashta, and Lower Gar this week with the approved aquatic herbicide, Sonar A.S. to eliminate Eurasian watermilfoil.

Sonar A.S. has successfully eradicated Eurasian watermilfoil from other lakes in Iowa by preventing the plant from producing a pigment needed for photosynthesis, starving the plant over several weeks. The herbicide has no restrictions for swimming, fishing, irrigation, or drinking water at the planned dose.

Treatments will continue through next spring. The Iowa DNR will test the water throughout the Iowa Great Lakes chain every two weeks to measure concentration of the herbicide and prescribe “bumps” of herbicide to maintain the herbicide concentration. These bumps can even be done through the ice.

The herbicide is effective at very low concentrations, explains Jason Euchner, aquatic vegetation management biologist for the Iowa DNR. “We will treat the lake at five parts per billion. Only sixty-three gallons of the herbicide will be needed to reach the desired concentration across all four lakes.”

Eurasian watermilfoil was discovered in the East Okoboji, Upper Gar, Lake Minnewashta, and Lower Gar in early August. This aggressive invasive plant is known to outcompete native plants and take over areas of a lake.

A group of representatives from the Iowa Great Lakes has been working with the Iowa DNR to formulate a management plan that could eliminate the plant from these lakes. Fast action is required since the plant is quickly expanding and could infest other lakes and wetlands in the chain making eradication nearly impossible.

Along with funding from the DNR, several local groups and organizations are helping to pay for this aggressive treatment plan, with partners committing over \$335,000 in only a couple of weeks.

Terry Wilts, with the East Okoboji Lakes Improvement Corporation, says, “This is a threat to all the lakes in the chain and to other surrounding lakes in the region. We are in this together and if there is a chance to take out this plant, we’d regret not taking that opportunity.”

Eurasian watermilfoil and curly-leaf pondweed, another invasive species in the Iowa Great Lakes, are very susceptible to Sonar A.S. The treatment should only impact these two species. Since Eurasian watermilfoil does not produce seeds, a single treatment can eliminate the plant. Curlyleaf pondweed will be drastically reduced because of the treatment, but will likely rebound since it produces seed-like structures that help it repopulate.

The DNR and local partners are starting to build a long-term management plan for the chain of lakes. If the project is successful, prevention will continue to be the best way to guard against future re-introduction. If the treatment is not successful, the group will discuss long-term management strategies.

“Keeping the plant out of the lakes over the past 30 years has allowed time for better tools to be developed for managing this plant,” said Mike Hawkins, district fisheries biologist with the Iowa DNR. “I’m confident we can work together locally to manage it long-term. In the meantime, we plan to take our best shot at eliminating it.”

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

On-stream Impoundment Restoration fund offers opportunities to improve water quality on eligible on-stream impoundments

DES MOINES – The on-stream impoundment restoration fund, created by the Iowa Legislature in 2021 and administered by the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR), will award funds to improve water quality and recreational opportunities on eligible on-stream impoundments throughout Iowa.

Up to \$500,000 will be awarded for State Fiscal Year 2023 through this competitive grant program to fund restoration projects that will protect, maintain, and enhance these popular recreation destinations and their related watersheds. Projects funded should ensure a cost-effective investment for the citizens of Iowa, a local community commitment to watershed protection, and improve overall water quality in the impoundment.

Information on how to apply for the On-Stream Impoundment Restoration Fund Grant is available online at <https://iowadnr.gov/onstreamimpoundment>. Applications are due Nov. 4, 2022.

Media Contact: George Antoniou, Iowa Department of Natural Resources Lake Restoration Program, george.antoniou@dnr.iowa.gov or 515-201-6775.