



IOWA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Iowa DNR News

Conservation and Recreation

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Series of islands in Mississippi River pools 16, 17 and 18 are public wildlife areas offering visitors rugged, solitary experience



The Mississippi River Islands Wildlife Area is a series of islands in pools 16, 17 and 18 covering around 6,700 acres that is open to hunting, fishing, hiking and primitive camping. Photo courtesy of the Iowa DNR.

Situated between the Quad Cities on the north and Burlington to the south is a number of islands that many Iowans may not know are open for public use.

The Mississippi River Islands Wildlife Area is a series of islands in pools 16, 17 and 18 covering around 6,700 acres that is open to hunting, fishing, hiking and primitive camping. These islands fall under the same rules as other wildlife areas and often host summer gatherings on the sandy areas.

“Sand usually marks the location where people hangout in the summer,” said Andy Robbins, wildlife biologist with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR).

“We see a lot of use in the summer and on the weekends in particular. The islands are all different – some have open woodlands, some are inhospitable and are covered in poison ivy and stinging nettles. It isn’t for everybody, but if you’re looking for a rugged experience – not completely secluded but for Iowa, it’s pretty close - this might be something you look at. You might have the entire island to yourself.”

A map showing which islands are open for public use under Iowa’s jurisdiction is available online at www.iowadnr.gov, click on places to hunt then zoom in to the southeast Mississippi River. There are similar islands located on the Illinois side of the river in these pools, and visitors are responsible for learning and following the rules governing islands managed by the State of Illinois.

Rivers are dynamic systems – always in a state of change. New islands popup and others erode. The drought over the past two years has allowed some of the sandbars to vegetate with sedges, millet and barnyard grass. If the river would rise a foot or two in the fall, these areas would provide excellent duck hunting.

The water level impacts the islands and years of consecutive high water and flooding has killed much of the tree community in certain areas. Today, the tree community is mostly cottonwood and silver maple, with few oaks, pecans and hickories remaining.

Robbins cautioned those who are not familiar with the Mississippi River to do some research before heading out.

“Be sure the river is well below flood stage, operate at a slow speed and watch for hazards,” he said. “There are closing dams in the some of the side chutes and wing dams all along the river that forces the current to stay in the main channel. You need to be looking for changes in the surface water to identify these dams. You don’t want to hit one.”

The river is managed to support commercial barge traffic and barges move continually up and down the river, with only winter and flooding bringing traffic to a halt.

On the main channel, the area between the buoys is maintained at a nine-foot minimum depth. The corps pumps out sand to maintain the channel creating beaches at certain locations. The U.S. Coast Guard maintains the navigation buoys. Outside the buoys, there is no depth guarantee.

River navigation charts are a great source of information and can be downloaded for free at <https://www.mvr.usace.army.mil/Missions/Navigation/Navigation-Charts/Upper-Mississippi-River/>

“If your paddling the river, be sure to understand the lock and dam system or I’d advise that you stay in one pool,” he said. Pools are pretty large. In fact, Pool 18 covers 12,000 surface acres.

On this hot August morning on Pool 18 in the middle of the week, only a few fishing boats were out. A supply boat was heading south to connect with a tow boat downriver. A pair of bald eagles were caring for their hatchling.

The Illinois side has a few small towns along the river’s edge, where boats can dock to get something to eat or to resupply, while the Iowa side is mostly bordered by floodplains and crop land. Iowa has numerous access points with boat ramps every five to six miles. Those ramps are easier to find with the online Iowa DNR Mississippi River Map Recreation Navigator

at <https://www.iowadnr.gov/fishing/fishing-maps>. The map shows the maximum river levels for ramp usability for most locations as well as other amenities including riverside fueling stops, campgrounds, bathrooms, wing dams, Illinois boat ramps, and more.

The Mississippi River is the largest and most diverse fishery in the state and the Corps has maps identifying the better places to fish.

“We have excellent walleye and sauger fishing below the dams in the fall or spring,” said Andy Fowler, fisheries biologist at the Iowa DNR’s Fairport Fish Hatchery. “Fishing is also good around the wing dams, depending on the river level. Channel catfish fishing in those same areas is awesome as well.”

Fowler said channel catfish fishing is excellent throughout the big river around brush piles, in the main and side channels. In the early summer, he said anglers are floating a gob of nightcrawlers or leeches under a slip bobber near rock piles such as the newly placed riprap by Huron Island and picking up a lot of channel catfish.

White bass fishing can be really good at the outlet of Lake Odessa when the lake level is being lowered or below Lock and Dam 16 or 17. The Huron Island complex has good areas to fish for panfish in the spring and fall, but accessing those areas is water level dependent.

Hunting is one of the primary activities on the islands in the fall – and almost exclusively for waterfowl and deer. While the deer might be difficult to pattern, there’s not likely much hunting competition. Once the hunting seasons close, it marks the end of the activities. The islands are inaccessible during the winter.

Habitat project

A portion of a Pool 18 backwater in Huron Island was identified by the Iowa DNR, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as a location that would likely support deep water habitat for overwintering fish, which, in the backwaters of the Mississippi River, is in short supply.

As part of a Corps funded Habitat Rehabilitation and Enhancement Project, a contractor created the necessary depth by removing silt to an adjacent spoil site.

“Fishing this new deep-water area is good now, and will get better in the future,” Fowler said. “It has less flowing water, and in the spring and fall, will be good places to fish for bluegills and crappies.”

This created an opportunity to re-create habitat on the spoil site by planting native trees and vegetation on the dredge material, and aquatic plants along the edge of the new deeper water. The aquatic plants were wrapped in protective cages to prevent carp, muskrats and other fish and wildlife from uprooting them.

Media Contacts: Andy Robbins, Wildlife Biologist, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 319-551-8459 or Andy Fowler, Fisheries Biologist, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 563-263-5062.

Iowa DNR to host public meetings on Chronic Wasting Disease

The Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) plans to host three meetings in October to provide an update to the public on chronic wasting disease surveillance and management efforts.

Meetings are scheduled for:

- Jefferson, Oct 4, 7 p.m., Clover Hall, Greene County Fairgrounds, 601 E. Lincoln Way
- Decorah, Oct. 6, 7 p.m., Valders Hall of Science, Room 206, Luther College, 700 College Drive
- Glenwood, Oct. 11, 7 p.m., American Legion Hall, 104 N. Vine Street

Tissue samples collected during the 2021-2022 surveillance season resulted in deer testing positive in both Fremont and Greene counties – the first time deer tested positive for the always fatal disease in these counties. In addition to Fremont and Greene counties, deer have tested positive in 10 other Iowa counties since 2013.

“Hunters and landowners play vital roles in the successful management of this disease in Iowa,” said Tyler Harms, deer program leader for the Iowa DNR. “These meetings are an opportunity for local hunters, landowners, and citizens to learn more about chronic wasting disease, what the DNR is doing to monitor and manage the disease in Iowa, and, most importantly, to ask questions.”

Chronic wasting disease is a neurological disease belonging to the family of diseases known as transmissible spongiform encephalopathies (TSEs) or prion diseases. It attacks the brain of infected deer causing the animal to lose weight, display abnormal behavior, lose body functions and die. It is always fatal to the infected animal.

To learn more about chronic wasting disease, including the DNR surveillance and management efforts, visit <https://www.iowadnr.gov/Hunting/Deer-Hunting/Deer-Health/Chronic-Wasting-Disease>

Any person attending the public meeting 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.

MEDIA CONTACT: Tyler Harms, Deer Program Leader, (515) 777-5378, or Dr. Rachel Ruden, State Wildlife Veterinarian (515) 823-8544.

State Preserve Advisory Board tours Yellow River State Forest and Turkey River Mounds State Preserve

The State Preserve Advisory Board will tour Yellow River State Forest and Turkey River Mounds State Preserve to prepare for review of issues that will be discussed at an upcoming business meeting (to be determined and announced later).

- **Yellow River State Forest** in Harpers Ferry (Allamakee County) - Sept. 29, 1 p.m., at the headquarters office (729 State Forest Road). The tour will feature options to manage oak woodlands.

- **Turkey River Mounds State Preserve**, near Millville (Clayton County) - Sept. 30, 8:30 a.m. at the at the parking lot of the former Bootleggers Tavern, in Millville (36835 Noble Road). The tour will examine options for forest management in the archaeological mounds area and recent hill prairie restoration work.

Media Contact: John Pearson, Iowa DNR ecologist, 515-669-7614, John.Pearson@dnr.iowa.gov