



IOWA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Iowa DNR News

Conservation and Recreation

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Nov. 1, 2022

- [Big Hartford Marsh offers easy access to unique wetland habitat](#)
- [Iowa's pheasant opener was busy, with lots of hunter success](#)
- [Firewise on the Farm](#)

Big Hartford Marsh offers easy access to unique wetland habitat



Big Hartford Marsh's 400-acres of shallow flooded habitat makes it a popular place for migrating ducks and for duck hunters who hunt from small boats or from waders. Photo courtesy of the Iowa DNR.

Big Hartford Marsh has been hosting duck hunters from across central and southern Iowa for 40 years because of the ability to pump water onto its 400 acres, even during years of drought.

The marsh, bordered by the Des Moines River to the north and by the South River to the east, in northeast Warren County, is fed water from the Des Moines River using a diesel pump to flood food and provide cover for migration ducks.

"This is a great option to have during drought years, like this year, when we're not able to raise the water levels on our stream fed marshes," said Todd Gosselink, wildlife biologist with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Red Rock Unit.

Pumping began in mid-September with a goal of flooding the habitat for waterfowl and for waterfowl hunters. The pump intake is about 20 feet from shore and the Iowa DNR is allowed to pump water as long as the Des Moines River flow is a minimum of 300 cubic feet per second (CFS). On this mid-October morning, the river flow was 323 CFS.

Given the drought conditions, the marsh is holding enough water to flood smartweed and wild millet. A flock of about 50 green wing teal flushed at the approach of the noisy mud motor powered boat. Winding through the clearing, another three flocks of larger ducks took flight, circling the marsh, waiting until the coast was clear.

Big Hartford Marsh provides options for hunters with small boats, canoes, kayaks or who hunt from waders.

Because the marsh is shallow, staff will mow certain areas before pumping begins to create open water as a visual cue to attract migrating ducks, and navigation lanes for the boats. The navigation lanes will have around 24 inches of water, with the rest of the marsh around half that.

“It’s hugely popular with duck hunters, especially if the refuge is functioning,” said Gosselink.

A 1,000-acre waterfowl refuge is just across the South River, a half-mile east of marsh. The refuge has its own pumping system flooding 250-300 acres providing ducks a place to rest and refuel during the fall migration. Ducks will move back and forth between the marsh and the refuge.

The marsh and refuge are along the Des Moines River flight corridor which is an important flyway for migrating ducks, geese and other birds. Sandhill cranes have been seen in the marsh and long billed curlews were found near the refuge.

The marsh parking lot also has a boat ramp on the Des Moines River that is popular with paddlers and anglers in the spring summer and fall.

“The explosion of kayaking has been a big change over the past 10-15 years, with even hunters using kayaks in shallow marshes such as Big Hartford Marsh to gain access to the entire marsh,” Gosselink said.

Media Contact: Todd Gosselink, Wildlife Biologist, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 515-238-6936.

Iowa’s pheasant opener was busy, with lots of hunter success

Hunters are home, the dogs are resting and Iowa’s opening weekend of pheasant season is in the rearview mirror. Reports from across the state varied from excellent up north to good in central and southwest Iowa, with the consensus that hunting will continue to improve once all the corn is harvested.

According to reports, hunters turned out in good numbers, filling parking lots and field access lanes.

“It’s the best bird numbers we’ve had since I’ve been in east-central Iowa. I’m still seeing hunters out today,” said Curt Kemmerer, wildlife biologist for the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Maquoketa Unit.

“Lots of hunters and good number of birds in central Iowa – a great opener,” said Captain Matt Bruner, supervisor for the Iowa DNR’s Law Enforcement Bureau for north-central Iowa.

“I counted 14 cars at one 475-acre area in north Iowa. The guys I talked to had seen birds, but also made comments about many more people than in the past,” said TJ Herrick, wildlife biologist for the Iowa DNR’s Clear Lake Unit.

“Lots of hunters out on Saturday,” said Matt Dollison, wildlife biologist for the Iowa DNR’s Nishnabotna Unit. “Bird numbers were similar to last year. Warm weather and standing corn made hunting a little difficult.”

Nonresident hunters were plentiful as well, with hunters from Minnesota, Wisconsin, Illinois, Nebraska and Ohio making up to one third of the cars in north Iowa parking lots.

Those field reports mirrored what the annual August roadside survey found.

“Our bird numbers are similar to last year so that should make some folks pretty happy,” said Todd Bogenschutz, upland wildlife research biologist with the Iowa DNR. “I think we’re set up for a good hunting year for pheasants, especially in northwest, west central and north central regions. Central too. Quail is also looking good in southwest and south-central Iowa.”

Iowa’s pheasant season runs through Jan. 10, 2023.

Firewise on the Farm

AMES - As Iowa’s annual harvest wraps up across the state, the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) encourages farmers to get reacquainted with fire prevention practices to keep the farm ‘firewise.’

This has been an extended drought year, particularly in the western part of the state. The following simple steps for a safer harvest can save time and money.

- **Properly prepare machinery** to reduce the chance of a field fire from an overheated bearing (check the manufacturer’s recommendations). A spark from an improperly lubricated combine can instantaneously ignite dry plants and field debris.

Check that all fire extinguishers carried on the machinery are fully charged with loose powder inside. If the powder is not loose, remove the extinguisher from its bracket then thump the canister with a rubber hammer until the powder moves when shaken.

Make sure the size of the extinguisher is appropriate for the size of the machinery. You may need larger and/or additional extinguishers. Also make sure you have the correct extinguisher for the type of fire to be extinguished. There are two types of extinguishers, the powder extinguisher for electrical and petroleum-based fires and the water extinguisher for vegetative fires. You may need to carry both kinds of extinguishers.

- **Keep equipment clean.** Check and remove combustible harvest debris from motors, exhausts, ledges and brackets several times a day. A portable gas-powered leaf blower is great for blowing debris from the various surfaces of the combine.
- **Service grain storage and drying equipment.** Storage facilities are like your bank vault. Protect their contents by properly servicing all bearings, belts, motors and drags.

Dryers frequently cause fires, so before drying grain have a qualified service technician perform the necessary maintenance. Keep weeds mowed around the facilities to discourage a fire from spreading. All extinguishers should be handy, fully charged, and the proper size and type for the area.

- **Turn off interior lighting in overfilled bins.** A grain fire will start if the grain surrounds the bulb. Turn off the light's breaker to avoid accidentally turning the light on. This also applies to hay storage facilities.
- **Handle hay properly.** Improper hay storage commonly causes or complicates farm fires. Preventative measures greatly reduce this risk.

Planning proper hay storage is crucial. Store hay away from combustibles such as gasoline, fertilizers and pesticides, as well as open burning areas like burn barrels, brush piles and vegetative burning. Arrange round bales in groups of 10 or fewer and place at least 100 feet away from structures. Leave 30 feet of mowed grass, bare ground or rock between the bale groups, creating a solid fire break.

Many hay fires occur by spontaneous combustion of moist hay, usually within six weeks after baling. Plan to bale hay at its driest stage and do not bale in the morning dew or too soon after a rain.

Check stored hay frequently for hot hay or an internal hay fire. Be aware of a caramel or strong burning odor, a visible vapor or smoke, a strong musty smell, and/or hay that is hot when touched. If any of these occur, call the fire department immediately and do not move the hay. Moving it exposes overheated or smoldering hay to oxygen, speeding the fire.

- **When tilling in the fall, till a 30 foot break** around building sites, remote bin sites and outside storage facilities to minimize fire spread, and around fields if there is excess fine fuels in the area. Remove weeds and other combustibles around structures and stored equipment.
- **If a fire occurs, remain calm, call 911 immediately.** Provide clear, concise directions to your location. Many field and bin sites do not have 911 addresses, so be prepared to identify an intersection or landmark to direct responders.

To help control field fires until firefighters arrive, remain calm and act swiftly. Quickly disk a fire break approximately 15 feet wide around the fire. Be cautious when doing this as smoke will starve and stall a motor and will make hazards and bystanders difficult to see. To assist with a structural fire, make sure there are no flammable objects nearby and if the circuit panel is safely accessible, turn off the building's electricity. If time allows, evacuate any livestock to a distant pasture. If possible, spray high-pressure water on any surrounding vegetation or structures, discouraging spreading embers. Do not take risks.

After using any equipment to fight a fire, check air filters, ledges, nooks and crannies for burning debris. For more detailed information, visit www.iowadnr.gov/Conservation/Forestry/Fire-Prevention/Fire-Protection-Prevention.

Remember, **in a fire emergency, call 911 immediately.** Do not wait until all your means of fighting the fire are exhausted. Every minute impacts your losses.

Media Contact: Gail Katak, Iowa DNR Forestry, Wildland Fire Supervisor, 515-689-0083 or gail.katak@dnr.iowa.gov.