



IOWA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Iowa DNR News

Conservation and Recreation

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Revive the Thanksgiving pheasant hunting tradition this year



Iowa's 2022 pheasant season has produced some of the best hunting in the past decade and peak hunting may be just starting.

"The formula has come together for good hunting over the Thanksgiving holiday – our bird numbers are up, the crop harvest is done and the recent fall temperature has been cooler than normal," said Todd Bogenschutz, upland wildlife biologist for the Iowa Department of Natural

Resources. "With our annual pheasant harvest predicted to be around 400,000 roosters, now is the time to get into the field."

Pheasant hunting over Thanksgiving was nearly as common as having turkey for the holiday meal. With Iowa's pheasant population running above its 10-year average, Bogenschutz said now would be a good time to restart the family pheasant hunting tradition.

Mark Johnson, 53, from Marshalltown, has spent many Thanksgivings hunting with his father and brother on the family farm in eastern Cherokee County.

"We would go hunting in the morning and know at the end of the day we'd have a good meal waiting for us when we got back," said Johnson who is looking forward to being in the field again Thursday with his brother Mike and father Robert. "I think it's going to be really good hunting, as good as it's been in a while."

The Johnsons will be trailing Mike's black lab through the terraces, fence lines and riparian habitat on the 800-acre farm.

"Over the years, the Thanksgiving Day hunt has always been more about the connection with family and less about the hunt itself," Johnson said.

Four states partner in Operation Early Birds waterfowl hunting enforcement project

The Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) joined its fellow agencies in Missouri, Kansas and Nebraska on a joint project to check waterfowl regulations compliance over a 36-hour period from the evening on Nov. 4 to the morning on Nov. 6.

In Iowa, the project, named Operation Early Birds, focused on the public wetland complexes of Forney Lake and the Riverton area, as well as the private marshes surrounding the public areas in Fremont County.

"I don't know how we could have hit the timing any better," said Captain Brian Smith, southwest district supervisor for the Iowa DNR's Law Enforcement Bureau. "It was a big migration day with high hunter participation. We brought in additional conservation officers and two federal fish and wildlife agents and that allowed us to cover a lot of ground in a short time."

He said Iowa was approached late in the planning process and that Iowa's success was due in part to the local insights from the conservation officer assigned to Fremont County.

Smith said Iowa officers made 136 contacts, issued 48 warnings and 23 citations in 36 hours. While the majority of hunters were in compliance, common issues were failure to register with the Harvest Information Program, not leaving either the head or a fully feathered wing on the dressed-out birds, and not signing or physically possessing the federal migratory stamp.

"This project had a waterfowl focus but we also checked pheasant and deer hunters," Smith said. "The officers were out there early and out there late. We made a lot of contacts and provided some education which hopefully prevents any future violations."

He said this time of year, there are a lot of different seasons open pulling conservation officers in many different directions and a project like this shows the demand placed on officers to be everywhere at all times.

As for the other states, in Kansas, officers made 93 contacts, issued six warnings and 14 citations; in Missouri, officers made 311 contacts, issued 80 warnings and 28 citations; and in Nebraska, officers made 20 contacts, issued one warning and no citations.

"It was a good project, and there was good cooperation between the four states and the Fish and Wildlife Service," Smith said.

Media Contact: Captain Brian Smith, Southwest District Supervisor, Law Enforcement Bureau, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 712-254-0550.

Safety tips for paddling in cold weather

Winter paddling can provide solitude, exercise and an opportunity to see amazing winter beauty. The Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) recommends that paddlers be prepared to paddle in cold weather.

Ice has started to form in many parts of the state. Know the conditions before you head out on the water.

"Many paddlers, especially those just starting out, don't realize how cold the water really is. The water is still dangerously cold and cold water shock and hypothermia can set in quickly," said Todd Robertson, Iowa DNR River Programs Water Trails Coordinator.

"Dress for the water temperature, not the air and expect to go into the water," Robertson said. "A wet or dry suit and a life jacket are crucial to remain safe."

Review these simple safety tips before you head out on the water this winter.

- Don't paddle alone. Especially in winter, use a buddy system.
- Always wear a life jacket.
- Make sure the entire water trail route and water body you are paddling is open on both rivers and lakes. Ice jams can form and water freeze as temperatures drop throughout the day.
- Stay away from wood/branch piles and debris, usually found on the outside of river bends, that can pull you underwater and hold you there with little chance of escape.
- Paddle with a group who is experienced in cold water paddling.
- Wear a dry suit or wet suit, along with layers, to help avoid hypothermia or cold water shock. Do not wear cotton. Dress for the water temperature, not the air.
- Bring along a dry bag with a set of extra clothes you can change into if you get wet, a first-aid kit and a protected cell phone or weather radio.
- Let a friend or loved one know where you are going and when you are expected to return. It will be easier to find you if you need help.

Explore the Iowa DNR's interactive paddling map at www.iowadnr.gov/Things-to-Do/Canoeing-Kayaking/Where-to-Paddle to help you plan your trip or outing.

Media Contact: Todd Robertson, Iowa DNR River Programs Outreach Coordinator at 515-205-6845.

DNR to host virtual public meeting regarding timber sale

The Iowa DNR will host a virtual public meeting on Dec. 8, 2022 at 6 p.m. regarding a salvage timber sale in Walnut Woods State Park, West Des Moines. The trees in the salvage area need to be removed for construction of the Athene Bridge, which will provide bike and walking trail access across the Raccoon River by connecting Walnut Woods State Park and West Des Moines' Raccoon River Park. Bridge construction is slated to begin in spring or summer of 2023.

Participants can access the virtual meeting link at: <https://meet.google.com/aim-fibk-jbq?authuser=0>

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Light green section on map denotes area affected.

Campground hosts needed for 2023 recreation season



The Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is seeking people who enjoy the outdoors, camping and meeting new people, to consider becoming volunteer campground hosts for the upcoming recreation season.

Volunteer campground hosts live in state parks from one to five months assisting DNR staff with light maintenance duties, checking in campers, and being a resource for visitors enjoying state parks and forests.

Campground hosts are provided a free campsite while they are actively hosting during the camping season. Hosts volunteer 20 – 40 hours per week, including weekends and holidays, while living on site in their own camper.

Host positions are available at:

- Brushy Creek
- Clear Lake
- George Wyth
- Honey Creek (South)
- Lacey-Keosauqua
- Lake Ahquabi
- Lake Darling
- Lake Keomah
- Lake Wapello
- McIntosh Woods
- Nine Eagles
- Pikes Peak
- Prairie Rose
- Red Haw
- Volga River (Equine)
- Walnut Woods

- Wapsipinicon
- Waubonsie
- Wilson Island
- Yellow River

Information about campgrounds and state parks is available online at www.iowadnr.gov/stateparks. To discuss the host position, contact the state park directly, or call 515-443-2533.

Banner and Olofson shooting ranges offer discounted annual passes

The Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has discounted its annual passes for the Banner and Olofson shooting ranges for 2023 by \$40 making it the perfect gift for the hard-to-buy-for member of the family.

From Nov. 25 to Dec. 31, individual passes will be available for \$200 and family passes for \$260 (this is a \$40 savings). Annual passes may be purchased at either range and is valid at both shooting ranges. If you currently have a pass this purchase will just add an additional year to your current pass.

Banner Range, between Indianola and Des Moines on Hwy. 65/69 in Warren County, is a multi-use shooting facility that offers a safe, clean shooting environment for handguns, rifles, archery, and shotguns. The range is staffed with professional certified range safety officers during all operating hours. Banner Range is open Monday, Tuesday and Friday, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Saturday and Sunday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Closed Wednesday and Thursday.

The Olofson Shooting Range, located off Hwy. 415, about five miles northwest of Polk City, features a classroom, handgun, rifle, Trap/Skeet, and archery ranges. The Olofson Range is open Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m., and Saturday and Sunday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Closed Monday and Tuesday.

Shooting ranges welcome shooters of all skill levels and abilities. Patrons have the ability to pay \$10 per hour or purchase an annual pass to cover their shooting time. Information on Iowa shooting ranges is available at <http://www.iowadnr.gov/Hunting/Places-to-Hunt-Shoot/Iowa-Shooting-Ranges>

Banner and Olofson shooting ranges are closed December 24, 25, and January 1.

Mitigation project addresses former strip mine sites on Pella Wildlife Area

The Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship will begin a project to restore a 165-acre portion of the Pella Wildlife Management Area that was previously used as a strip mine.

The work will require removing trees and other vegetation to allow the landscape to be reshaped to a more natural appearance. This also allows the DNR to physically remove various

invasive plant species that are dominating this area. Once that work is done, it will be restored to a native shortgrass prairie and oak woodlands.

Wetlands will also be restored to the current acreage, providing shallow habitat for amphibians and waterfowl. A few of the pine plantations will also remain to add more tree diversity for wildlife use.

Before the project can begin, the Iowa DNR will solicit bids from the public to conduct a salvage timber harvest on the mined areas to allow the wood resource to be used, said Todd Gosselink, wildlife biologist overseeing the Pella Wildlife Area for the Iowa DNR. The harvest will take place during the dormant season beginning this December. Hauling logs may take place throughout the year. The timber salvage will be completed by March 2024.

“This mine reclamation project will only address the sections that were previously mined and will not impact the rest of this wildlife area,” Gosselink said. “We will continue to maintain and improve the other 112 acres of forest on the area.”

The reclamation project was the topic of two public meetings last winter where Gosselink outlined the work to be done, the area impacted along with the project timeline.

“The goal of this project is to improve the wildlife habitat and provide a more usable public wildlife area,” he said. “Restoring the grassland will provide important benefits to grassland birds, quail and pheasants.”

The Pella Wildlife Area covers 277 acres, one mile south of Pella, in Marion County.

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