



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Dec. 13, 2022

- [First Day Hikes at Iowa State Parks: Join the Fun with the Parks Passport and Guided Hikes](#)
- [Iowa's native brook trout thrive in northeast Iowa streams thanks to restoration efforts](#)
- [Snowmobile and off-highway vehicle registrations expire at year's end](#)
- [Summer seasonal positions open at fisheries offices](#)

## First Day Hikes at Iowa State Parks: Join the Fun with the Parks Passport and Guided Hikes

DES MOINES – So what are you doing over New Year's?

The DNR invites Iowans to step outside and enjoy Iowa state parks and forests in the [2023 First Day Hike Challenge](#). Visitors can ring in the New Year with the Parks Passport on their own, or by joining park staff on a guided hike.

"First Day Hikes are a popular tradition in state parks, and the Park Passport is a great way for people to enjoy winter hikes," said Sherry Arntzen, chief of the Iowa DNR's Parks, Forests and Preserves Bureau.

With the First Day Hike Challenge, park visitors can check into more than 50 participating state parks and forests on the Park Passport from Dec. 30 through Jan. 1. Visitors can explore as many parks as they wish -- every check-in will qualify for a prize drawing of a **two-night stay at a cabin at Pine Lake State Park, Eldora**. Some restrictions and fees apply.

Hikers can experience the quiet beauty of nature in winter, and spectacular views, beautiful settings and cultural treasures. Several parks and forests will host guided hikes on New Year's Day, including some providing hot chocolate and snacks. Participants should dress for winter conditions.

More details on First Day Hikes, including a list of guided hikes with times and meeting locations, are available online at [www.iowadnr.gov/firstdayhikes](http://www.iowadnr.gov/firstdayhikes). The State Park Passport is free and can be downloaded onto mobile devices at <https://explore.traveliowa.com/checkout/311/travel-iowa/1619/iowa-state-park-passport>. Visitors will find trail suggestions and directions from park staff under the "More Info" tab for each park on the Passport.

---

## Iowa's native brook trout thrive in northeast Iowa streams thanks to restoration efforts

Years of work to protect and enhance the South Pine Creek watershed in Winneshiek County has allowed Iowa's only native trout to thrive and continue to naturally reproduce in that stream.

In 1994, a genetically-distinct strain of healthy brook trout was found in South Pine Creek, a tiny string of water buried between lush vegetation. These brook trout have likely called this place home since before the first European settlers came to the region.

DNR fisheries staff take special care when spawning South Pine brook trout. Instead of spawning the fish in the hatchery, like they do with domesticated strains of rainbow trout, technicians go on site and spawn the fish on the river bank and bring the eggs back to the hatchery.

"The eggs are hatched and raised to about 2 inches in size, and reintroduced into other streams to protect this unique Iowa ancestry of brook trout from a catastrophic loss if it was to occur on South Pine Creek," said Michael Siepker, fisheries biologist with the Iowa DNR's Chuck Gipp Decorah Fish Hatchery.

Siepker estimates that there are about 500 miles of coldwater streams in northeast Iowa. Not every mile is suitable for brook trout, but there are many miles where brook trout can be stocked. "Iowans deserve to have these beautiful native brook trout in any place that we can have them," Siepker said.

The ability to sustain trout indicates great stream improvement, as they're an indicator species of northeast Iowa's streams, demanding the coldest and cleanest waters to prosper. DNR staff consider water temperature, water monitoring results, current fish populations and streambank erosion data before stocking trout in a stream.

"Our capacity to restore brook trout is fairly limited to the number of eggs we can collect from South Pine," explains Siepker. "We have about 12,000 fingerlings a year that we can use for restoration stockings in about ten sites. "

Brook trout are stocked into a new stream with suitable habitat three consecutive years to try to establish a strong and healthy population. About three years after the last stocking, fisheries staff sample the stream to see if there are young brook trout in the stream.

The process to determine where this colorful trout that is part of Iowa's history is stocked is a complex process that involves a lot of partners. "The areas that are determined viable to reintroduce brook trout have undergone significant conservation work to reduce bacteria and sediment," said Steve Hopkins with the DNR's Water Quality Bureau. In some streams, it's been decades since trout have been able to naturally reproduce and survive.

Before work began on watersheds such as the Yellow River Headwaters and Silver Creek in Winneshiek and Howard counties, excess bacteria and sediment runoff primarily from farmlands, unstable streambanks, and pastures contributed to elevated temperatures and pollution in streams, creating an unsuitable habitat for trout.

Grants from Section 319 of the Clean Water Act have funded land improvement efforts on these watersheds, such as stabilizing streambanks, restoring floodplains, and soil conservation and soil health practices. The DNR has also worked with landowners to reduce the amount of livestock manure that could run into streams and cause the growth of algae and bacteria.

Although the watershed project goals were to reduce bacteria, sediment reduction most benefited the trout. The best management practices, such as cover crops and improved manure storage, and terraces, also helped reduce sediment to those waters, which improved habitat for trout.

Trout lay their eggs in gravel so clear conditions are critical - sediment can smother the eggs and prevent new trout from hatching.

“When you have improved water quality and habitat you have more robust trout populations,” said Mike Steuck, Northeast Iowa fisheries supervisor. “They can successfully reproduce on their own and we don’t have to stock them. We can put our resources into more habitat or stocking other streams that are of lesser quality.”

Healthier streams have been able to support larger and naturally reproducing populations of trout. As work in watersheds to reduce sediment delivery to the streams continues and expands, there is a new goal: To restore native South Pine Brook Trout populations in those clear, cold streams.

“Because of less sediment and better habitat, streams have trout that are reproducing on their own,” Steuck said.

**Media Contact:** Mike Steuck, Regional Fisheries Supervisor, Northeast Iowa, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 563-927-3276.

---

## Snowmobile and off-highway vehicle registrations expire at year's end

Registrations for snowmobiles and OHVs purchased during the 2022 registration cycle expire Dec. 31. Any decal displayed on a machine with a 22 printed on it will no longer be valid for machines used on snowmobile trails, public ice, or the OHV parks. Any registration that is not renewed prior to Jan. 1, 2023, will have a late penalty of \$5 applied to the cost of the registration.

All user permits, which include resident snowmobiles and nonresident snowmobiles and OHVs, also expire Dec. 31. There is no late penalty for a permit purchased after Jan. 1, as they are issued for a calendar year. User permits are required for nonresident and resident snowmobiles used on public land or ice. Nonresident off road vehicles registered in their home state must display a user permit. Residents operating an off-highway vehicle do not need a user permit.

---

## Summer seasonal positions open at fisheries offices

The Iowa DNR Fisheries Bureau has openings for seasonal fisheries aides for the summer 2023 season at fisheries offices across Iowa.

Learn about fisheries careers and gain valuable experience while working alongside biologists and technicians. Positions are available in research, management, culture and aquatic invasive species.

The DNR is looking for applicants who have a keen interest in a biological, conservation or environmental science career or have graduated from or are currently enrolled in a college with a biological, conservation or environmental science program, or are about to enter their first semester of college from high school.

Find more details on job duties, locations and how to apply on the DNR website at [www.iowadnr.gov/Employment](http://www.iowadnr.gov/Employment). Application deadline is January 6, 2023.

For more information about these positions, contact Bryan Hayes at 712-769-2587 or [Bryan.Hayes@dnr.iowa.gov](mailto:Bryan.Hayes@dnr.iowa.gov)