



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Visitors expected to fill parks over Memorial Day weekend

Iowa state parks and forests are gearing up for a busy Memorial Day weekend, the traditional start of the outdoor summer recreation season.

“Park visitors are excited to get outside and enjoy the beautiful weather after a long winter inside,” said Sherry Arntzen, chief of the DNR’s State Parks, Forests and Preserves Bureau. “Our parks offer a variety of activities for all enthusiasts from hiking the trails to picnicking, fishing and swimming. There’s something for everyone while enjoying the outdoors.”

Campers are urged to plan ahead when visiting Iowa state parks and forests for Memorial Day weekend. Most electrical and full hookup sites in busy parks are already reserved, so campers may want to consider non-electric sites or at “hidden gem” parks a little further away from home. Additionally, Iowa state parks and forests offer around 1,200 non-reservable sites available on a first-come, first-served basis, with most people choosing to stay Thursday through the weekend.

To find site availability and make a reservation, go to <https://iowastateparks.reserveamerica.com/> For an up-to-date list of park and trail closures due to renovations or weather-related alerts, visit: <http://www.iowadnr.gov/Places-to-Go/State-Parks/Alerts-and-Closures>

Park visitors can help take care of the parks by cleaning up trash after themselves, and carrying out what they brought in. Please park vehicles in designated parking lots and not along roadways. If visiting beaches, be aware that most swimming areas do not have a lifeguard on duty, and pets must be kept off beaches and be on a leash.

“We hope that campers enjoy their time and make memories while staying in our parks and recreational areas, and do so safely and return again,” Arntzen said.

Tips

- Keep track of the weather and have a plan in case of severe weather
- Pack bug spray, sun screen and a basic first-aid kit
- Check the registration kiosk for activities in the area
- Don't burn trash
- Don't bring fireworks
- Be a good neighbor. Observe quiet hours and pick up after yourself

Media Contact: Sherry Arntzen, DNR Parks Bureau Chief, 515-346-7036, Sherry.Arntzen@dnr.iowa.

Boaters to hit the waters this Memorial Day weekend

The unofficial beginning to summer is just days away and that also marks the unofficial beginning of Iowa's boating season. Boaters across the state are anxious to get out on the lake after the cool and wet spring and are preparing their watercraft for the long holiday weekend.

Susan Stocker, boating law administrator and education coordinator for the Iowa Department of Natural Resources, said safety should be the top priority for all boaters.

In 2022, there were 28 reported boating incidents on Iowa waters: seven of those were personal injury; 17 involved property damage, and four resulted in fatalities. Of the four fatalities, one involved alcohol as a contributing factor.

“Now is the time to review Iowa boating laws and plan to have patience at the ramp and on the water,” she said. “With the recent storms across the state, boaters should use extra caution for floating debris and higher waters.”

Stocker advised to have someone on your watercraft be a lookout for large debris that is often under the water with only a small portion showing above water. It is easy to miss and can cause major damage to your vessel. Be sure to check ahead that the boat ramps are open before heading out.

Just like any party on land, boaters should plan ahead to have a designated sober operator that is cautious with speed and on the lookout for other vessels.

Another way boaters can stay on the water is by inspecting their vessels prior to heading to the lake.

Lifejackets should be in good condition and the right size for each person onboard. Check the fire extinguisher, boat and trailer lights, whistle, and throwable floatation.

Boaters are reminded about the requirement that drain plugs and other water draining devices must be removed and/or remain open during transport to avoid spreading invasive species. Anglers leaving with fish are recommended to put them on ice, whether in a cooler, a bucket or a live well (plug must still be removed and/or opened).

Iowa has more than 231,000 registered boats.

BOATING SAFETY TIPS

- Alcohol and boating don't mix. Wind, sun glare and heat can enhance the effects of alcohol hindering the operator's ability to make decisions.
- Check for open ramps or water hazards before heading out.
- Before leaving the house, check the trailer lights, wheel bearings and the hitch.
- Make sure there is a current fire extinguisher and horn/whistle, a wearable life jacket for everyone and a USCG approved flotation device onboard.
- File a float plan with a friend, including your destination, expected time of return and type of boat.
- Wear your lifejacket - it floats, you don't.
- Inflatable lifejackets are light weight, comfortable and USCG approved. Wear it.
- Take a boater education course available online at <https://www.iowadnr.gov/Things-to-Do/Boating/Boater-Education>. It has valuable information and many insurance companies will offer a discount on boat insurance. Familiarize yourself with Iowa's boating laws.
- Top two safety violations in Iowa are having inadequate life jackets and operating too fast and too close to other vessels.

Media Contact: Susan Stocker, Boating Law Administrator and Education Coordinator, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 515-313-6439.

Iowa's spring turkey season is one for the books

Despite a rainy cold closing weekend across much of state, Iowa's wild turkey hunters reported harvesting more than 14,800 birds through the mandatory

registration system, an increase of nearly 3,000 versus the 2022 harvest.

Iowa's spring turkey seasons began April 7 with the youth season and ended on May 14. Hunters purchased nearly 54,500 spring turkey tags, an increase of 2,000 licenses from 2022.

Turkey production has been good across most of the state the past two years and these two-year-old birds were likely a good portion of the harvest, said Jim Coffey, forest wildlife biologist with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR).

"The two-year-old birds are the most likely to gobble and the most likely to move," he said. "When we combine birds willing to move, pretty good weather during the season and the great passion our turkey hunters have for the resource, we get a harvest for the record books."

While the hunting season may be done for 2023, Iowans can help the DNR with its annual turkey production estimates by reporting all the turkeys seen during the months of July and August. This annual survey is designed to predict the overall production of wild turkeys that will be available for the 2024 season.

The DNR will have a link to the survey on its website before it begins on July 1, where Iowans seeing wild turkeys are asked to provide the date and county in which the turkey(s) was seen, if it was an adult female or adult male (males have beards on their breast), and whether there are young poults (baby turkeys) present.

Annual production surveys conducted by the DNR are an important component of the species management plans, which includes providing hunting opportunities. Anyone seeing turkeys is encouraged to participate in this online survey.

Media Contact: Jim Coffey, Forest Wildlife Biologist, Wildlife Bureau, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 641-774-2958.

Annual surveillance confirms 96 deer and three new counties for chronic wasting disease

Chronic wasting disease was confirmed in 96 deer that were tested during the 2022 monitoring season, including deer from three new counties – Jasper, Grundy, and Lucas. With the addition of Jasper County, chronic wasting disease has again come into central Iowa.

The Iowa DNR will be hosting public meetings in Newton and in Black Hawk County in the coming months to discuss chronic wasting disease, how hunters can help with the surveillance effort and what they can do to help prevent the spread of the disease.

“We thought of Jasper County as seemingly far away from the disease. That changed last year with our first detection in Greene County,” said Dr. Rachel Ruden, state wildlife veterinarian with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR). “Based on data coming out of other states, we’ve learned that deer can travel much greater distances than previously thought - 75 to 100 miles – so there really isn’t any place in Iowa where this disease can’t turn up.”

She said additional tissue samples will be collected from the new counties for the upcoming year to get a better picture for what is going on in these areas.

While the disease showed up in three new counties, it hasn’t been found in Woodbury County for two years and in Decatur County since 2019.

“The increased sampling after initial detections in Woodbury and Decatur counties did not yield additional positives, so the quotas in these areas will likely be downgraded to one tier above their previous baseline sampling goals,” Ruden said. “Now that doesn’t mean we won’t find it in the future.”

The Iowa DNR identifies the location of each of the positives and the year it was confirmed on its chronic wasting disease online dashboard at <https://www.iowadnr.gov/Hunting/Deer-Hunting/Deer-Health/Chronic-Wasting-Disease/Surveillance-Results>.

The Iowa DNR samples around 5,000 deer each year. More than 100,000 tissue samples have been collected and tested since 2002. The first deer tested positive in 2013, in Allamakee County. A total of 259 deer have tested positive to date.

The Iowa DNR partners with hunters, conservation boards, the Iowa Department of Transportation, taxidermists, lockers, city departments and others to collect samples for testing.

The DNR also implemented targeted incentive zone hunts in three counties - Allamakee, Clayton and Wayne.

“Part of our disease management strategy is to focus additional antlerless harvest in localized areas where we have found a high density of positive deer and this year, 29 of the 96 positives- nearly one third - came from these hunts,” Ruden said.

Part of that harvest success in the endemic areas may be due to outreach staff working in the area to increase the visibility of the disease. This is the second year the outreach specialists, funded by a grant from the USDA, have been working in these areas.

Media Contact: Tyler Harms, Biometrician, Wildlife Bureau, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 515-777-5378.

Help stop aquatic hitchhikers this Memorial Day weekend

The Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) reminds all boaters and anglers to “Clean, Drain, and Dry” their boats and equipment this Memorial Day weekend to protect Iowa lakes and rivers from aquatic hitchhikers.

Aquatic invasive species, everything from zebra mussels to Eurasian watermilfoil, move from one waterbody to another by hitchhiking on boats, in bait buckets and on other equipment used in the water. They often grow quickly and spread fast when brought to another lake or stream due to lack of natural controls.

“Boaters and anglers can help slow the spread of aquatic invasive species to new water bodies by checking their boat and equipment for unwanted hitchhikers after each time on the water,” said Kim Bogenschutz, aquatic invasive species program coordinator for the Iowa DNR.

Aquatic invasive species can create serious problems for Iowa waters by reducing native species and making lakes and rivers unusable for boaters, anglers and swimmers.

Clean, Drain, Dry is a simple three step process that boaters need to follow every time they move from one body of water to another.

- CLEAN any plants, animals, or mud from your boat and equipment before you leave a waterbody.
- DRAIN water from all equipment (motor, live well, bilge, transom well, bait bucket) before you leave a waterbody.
- DRY anything that comes into contact with water (boats, trailers, equipment, boots, clothing, dogs). Before you move to another waterbody either: Spray your boat and trailer with hot or high-pressure water; or Dry your boat and equipment for at least five days.
- Never release plants, fish, or animals into a waterbody unless they came out of that waterbody and empty unwanted bait in the trash.

It is illegal to possess or transport prohibited aquatic invasive species. It is also illegal to transport any aquatic plants on water-related equipment in Iowa. Signs posted at public accesses remind boaters to stop aquatic hitchhikers and identify infested waters.

Boaters must also drain all water from boats and equipment before they leave a water access and keep drain plugs removed or opened during transport. It is also illegal to introduce any live fish, except for hooked bait, into public waters.

Find more information about aquatic invasive species and a list of infested waters in the current *Iowa Fishing Regulations* or at www.iowadnr.gov/ais.

Media Contact: Kim Bogenschutz, Fisheries Bureau's Aquatic Invasive Species Program Coordinator, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 515-290-0540.

Safety tips for river recreation this summer

Iowa rivers will soon be busy with paddlers, swimmers, and people wading to search for fossils, rocks and driftwood or to clean up litter or explore a sandbar.

Rivers are dynamic systems that change with high flows and have obstacles hidden just beneath the water surface. Iowa rivers can have sudden drop-offs, holes, submerged shelves, foot holds and rock ledges. Current strength is often deceiving even for strong swimmers.

Follow these simple steps for a fun and safe summer on Iowa rivers:

- **Wear it!** Always wear a properly fitted, personal flotation device (PFD). Make sure kids wear their life jackets before getting in the water. Most drowning victims in river incidents were not wearing a life jacket.
- **Become a proficient swimmer** Swimming is a life-saving, life-long healthy activity that makes time near water enjoyable. If you haven't swam in a long-time, refresh your abilities. And all ages—tots to elders—can learn to swim. Instructors make learning relaxing, especially for those who fear the water. Inquire at municipal pools, colleges or YMCA facilities or with a private instructor. *All children* should learn to swim with formal lessons.
- **Be alert.** Using drugs or alcohol reduces judgment. Alcohol is a factor in more than half of drownings.
- **Avoid areas near dams.** Avoid getting in the water – swimming, wading, or boating – near low-head dams. Unexpected “roller” currents at dams are related to an average of 1.5 river fatalities per year.
- **Stay clear of obstacles.** Downed trees, common in rivers, can act like kitchen sink “strainers,” catching people and holding them in it. Other obstacles like bridge piers, scrap metal, or clusters of rocks or concrete can be hazardous in similar ways. Avoid wading in fast water. Look for known hazards that have been reported to DNR through their interactive river map at iowadnr.gov/Things-to-Do/Canoeing-Kayaking/Where-to-Paddle.
- **Watch your kids.** Constantly watch young children when swimming or playing near water. Drowning occurs quickly and quietly. Be close enough to touch the child at all times. Even in ankle deep water, the current can be strong enough to sweep you off your feet and out into deeper water.
- **Learn CPR** CPR from a bystander is proven to save lives and improve outcomes for near-drownings. The quicker CPR begins, the better the results. In the time needed for paramedics to arrive, your CPR skills could save a life or prevent permanent damage. If already certified, learn the latest techniques

and refresh your skills by recertifying. Inquire at your local hospital, workplace or doctor's office for classes.

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

Improve your paddling skills with DNR canoe and kayak schools

DES MOINES —Naturalists, youth group leaders and others who bring people out on the water in canoes or kayaks and want to learn how to teach others about paddling efficiently and safely are encouraged to attend one of the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) paddling schools scheduled June through September.

Each two-day course will cover skills, hazard and river feature identification, teaching to different learning styles, and risk management. The focus will be one-third classroom and two-thirds on-water in both lake and river environments, solo and tandem. Paddling schools are set up for either canoeing or kayaking instruction. Make sure you sign up for your preferred instruction.

All courses will be taught at Briggs Woods, along the Boone River in Hamilton County. The canoe school is limited to 12 participants and the kayak school is limited to eight participants. Participants have the options to camp, rent a cabin, or stay in Webster City at a motel while participating in the two-day school. Overnight accommodations are not included in the class fee.

Registration is required; the fee is \$65. This is not a beginner level course; participants should have previous paddling experience.

The schedule for DNR's paddling school is:

- June 6-7, Kayak School
- 23-24, Canoe School
- 29-30, Kayak School
- 12-13, Canoe School

To register or for more information, go to www.iowadnr.gov/Things-to-Do/Canoeing-Kayaking/How-to-Paddle/Canoe-Kayak-Schools. Get your registration in quickly, the paddling schools fill up fast.

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

MADD, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, team up for boating BUI and ATV DUI prevention campaign to kick off summer recreation season

Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) Illinois volunteers and staff are teaming up with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to promote safe boating and ATV seasons and to educate about the dangers of operating a boat, watercraft, and all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) while impaired by alcohol or other drugs.

“Recreational Vehicle impaired crashes affect families the same way as road vehicles impaired crashes do,” said MADD Iowa regional executive director Erin Payton. “Unfortunately, there is not always the same mindset for recreational vehicle drivers in terms of choosing to operate them sober.”

According to the U.S. Coast Guard, alcohol is a leading known contributing factor in fatal boating incidents. Where the primary cause was known, alcohol was listed as the leading contributing factor in 18 percent of deaths in 2020.

Additionally, a boater is likely to become impaired more quickly than an automobile driver, and even moderate drinking can cause significant impairment on a boat. The environmental stressors of the marine environment - motion, vibration, engine noise, sun, wind, and spray - accelerate the impairing effect of alcohol. These stressors cause fatigue that makes a boater’s coordination, judgment and reaction time decline even faster when using alcohol.

Operating a boat with a blood alcohol content (BAC) of .08 or higher is against federal law and most state laws.

The Insurance Institute for Highway Safety created a Fatality Facts 2020: Motorcycles and ATVs report. Where the primary cause of ATV crash was known there were 111 estimated ATV deaths with BACs greater or equal to 0.08, and 73 estimated ATV deaths with BACs greater or equal to 0.15.

“It’s important to remember that operating any type of vehicle while under the influence on the water or on land can cause traumatic injuries and tragic loss of life,” said Susan Stocker, Iowa DNR boating law administrator/education coordinator. “If your plans include alcohol, consider doing so on shore AFTER you are finished boating for the day and have a designated driver to get you to your next destination on land.”

MADD and the Iowa DNR remind all recreation explorers to take the following safety precautions this summer:

Boats

- Take a boating safety course

- Boat responsibly on the water
- Wear a life jacket
- Attach the engine cut-off switch
- Get a free vessel safety check
- Never drink or use drugs and operate a boat

Find more information at madd.org/bui

ATVs

- Take an ATV safety course
- Always wear appropriate gear (helmets, goggles, clothing)
- Ride an ATV that's right for your age
- Never carry a passenger on a single-rider ATV
- Supervise riders younger than 16
- Never drink or use drugs and operate an ATV or UTV

Media Contact: Susan Stocker, Boating Law Administrator and Education Coordinator, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 515-313-6439.

Maquoketa & North Fork Maquoketa Water Trail dedicated May 31

The Maquoketa & North Fork Maquoketa Water Trail, in Jackson County, will be officially dedicated as Iowa's newest water trail during a public ceremony at 10 a.m., May 31, at Canton County Park along the Maquoketa River, in western Jackson County.

Water trails are recreational routes on rivers and lakes that provide a unique experience for paddlers. Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has partnered with Jackson County Conservation and East Central Intergovernmental Association (ECIA) to develop a water trails master plan for the Maquoketa River and North Fork of the Maquoketa River in Jackson County. The master plan provides a future vision for river recreation in Jackson County and identifies improvements to river access, parking, safety and more.

Following the ribbon cutting ceremony, participants will have the option to take a guided paddling trip down the river from Canton to Royertown Access. Participants must provide their own canoe or kayak and life jackets. Jackson County Conservation staff will provide shuttling service. Registration for the paddle is

required. Contact Jackson County Conservation at 563-652-3783 or jwagner@jacksoncounty.iowa.gov to register for the event.

Learn more about this new water trail, including a map, on the DNR webpage at www.iowadnr.gov/paddling.

Media Contact: John Wenck, Iowa Department of Natural Resources Water Trails Coordinator, 515-494-8629 or john.wenck@dnr.iowa.gov.