



IOWA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Iowa DNR News

Conservation and Recreation

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Weather model forecasts bump in Iowa pheasant population

Favorable winter and spring weather across much of Iowa is expected to benefit pheasant hunters this fall.

Todd Bogenschutz, upland wildlife research biologist with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR), said each summer, the DNR uses a model based on winter and spring weather conditions, previous weather data and more than 50 years of pheasant roadside population surveys to predict pheasant population trends for the fall.

“Given the statewide information, our weather model is predicting pheasant populations will likely be higher for the fall 2023 hunting season,” Bogenschutz said. “There will likely be regional differences given the tougher winter in northern regions and more favorable conditions in central and southern Iowa.”

Statewide, snowfall from December through March averaged one inch above average, but the northern third of Iowa, and the central region, saw significantly more snowfall, likely reducing hen survival in the northwest and northcentral regions where total winter snowfall exceeded three feet.

Conversely, the southern third of Iowa saw very little snowfall all winter, about one foot, and hen survival should be excellent in these regions. Southern Iowa’s mild winter will likely lead to higher quail numbers, too.

“Even with the regional fluctuation, the best pheasant densities will likely still be in northern and western regions of the state,” he said.

Every model comes with a caveat and the spring nesting forecast is no different. This prediction is based on weather data and it can be wrong, Bogenschutz said. “The August roadside survey is the best gauge of what upland populations will be this fall.”

The August roadside survey is conducted each year between Aug. 1-15, over the same 218, 30-mile routes. Survey results will be posted online at www.iowadnr.gov/pheasantsurvey around Sept. 15.

Media Contact: Todd Bogenschutz, Upland Wildlife Research Biologist, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 515-979-0828.

Work at Towhead Lake supports grassland species, upland gamebirds



Towhead Lake is being restored as a wetland-grassland ecosystem. Photo courtesy of the Iowa DNR.

Towhead Lake was once a natural shallow lake, with a network of connected wetlands, considered sovereign land by the state highway commission when it visited the area in the 1910s.

With a maximum depth of just over three feet, an apparent lack of fish, and a thick stand of rushes and marsh grass, the 1916 Survey of Highway Commission suggested in its survey report that the lake be drained and the resulting land maintained in state ownership.

Historical documents show that in the 1950s, a local state conservation officer was present during a winter circle fox hunt on Towhead Lake and reported the number of pheasants wintering on this area was between 2,000 and 2,500, “similar to the year before.” At that time, it was a common practice to plant trees and shrubs to benefit pheasants. So, the Conservation Commission planted Russian olive, honeysuckle, black locust, cedar, ash, hackberry, white pine, and even multiflora rose. Reed canary grass was also introduced into poorly drained areas in an effort to outcompete Canada thistle.

To those driving past the easily visible, 196-acre public wildlife area adjacent to county highway D15, west of Knoke (town motto, ‘Knoke, Next 3 Exits’) in Calhoun County, the changes at Towhead Lake are significant.

“We’re currently working to remove many species that are now considered invasive. We want to restore the area back to a wetland-grassland ecosystem. The plan is to control some of these introduced species and promote a more diverse

landscape of native plants,” said Clint Maddix, wildlife biologist, with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources Black Hawk Wildlife Unit, in Lake View.

Today, much of the work has focused on removing those species planted 70 years ago. Dense tree plantings on the area had filled in with honeysuckle and buckthorn making it difficult to walk through and leaving the ground bare underneath.

With many of the trees downed and invasive shrubs removed, the landscape more likely resembles what was surveyed by the highway commission more than 100 years ago.

The area management plan calls for a combination of increasing prescribed fire intervals and targeted chemical applications, likely beginning this fall, to knock back the re-sprouting trees and shrubs, and manage the prairie.

“We want to manage this area for grassland dependent wildlife species and improve the habitat for upland game birds and migrating birds,” he said.

While there has been progress, a lot of challenges remain.

A small stand of black locust on the south end requires a planned approach to remove it because as a species, it thrives on being damaged. To get rid of it will require the stumps to be treated after the trees are cut. If not, it will come back thicker. The southeast section has phragmites which has been treated through aerial herbicide application, but has come back as thick as before. It will be treated again.

A row of dogwoods – a shrub native to Iowa – lines part of the western portion and will remain on the area. Its flowers are being frequented by monarchs and clouded sulphur butterflies. A brown thrasher darts ahead in the shrubs; a gray catbird can be heard deep in the thicket.

With much of the trees and shrubs removed, some remnant prairie plants have started to show up – cord grass, goldenrod, cup plant, sawtooth, and lots of milkweed.

About halfway south from the parking lot, the oddly shaped area extends east. Here, a hayfield and small section of row crops are tucked out of sight. A Dickcissel sits on the boundary sign calling and responding to another in the area. A hen pheasant flushes near a redwing blackbird nest home to two eggs. An upland sandpiper is spotted nervously flying away from cover near the old lake shoreline. On the southwest corner just behind the small soybean plot, a rooster pheasant has spent his morning crowing.

On this hot, cloudless day in late June, there’s a lot going on at Towhead Lake.

Media Contact: Clint Maddix, Wildlife Biologist, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 712-661-9726.

Swimmers itch is showing up, right on schedule

Swimmer’s itch is starting to make its presence known in many of Iowa’s natural lakes in north central and northwest Iowa.

The condition is caused by parasitic flatworms. The flatworm eggs are transferred to water by bird droppings. The eggs hatch and infect snails, from which the free

swimming form of the flatworm larvae emerges. In the absence of a suitable host, such as a bird, the parasite will attempt to penetrate the skin of humans, after which it quickly dies, causing an allergic reaction below the skin resulting in welts and itching.

There are few simple steps swimmers can take to help prevent swimmers itch.

First, if possible, avoid swimming in areas containing aquatic plants because marshy areas often contain snails, which are the parasite's intermediate host. Swimmers can also reduce the amount of time in the water, avoid beaches that are being pounded by waves and dry off quickly when getting out of the lake.

The welts and itching caused by the parasitic little pest can last for several days to about a week and usually don't require a visit to the doctor. An antihistamine along with calamine lotion can be used to treat the affected areas.

For more information on swimmer's itch visit the following websites:

<http://www.cdc.gov/parasites/swimmersitch/>

<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/swimmers-itch/DS00902>

Media Contact: Daniel Kendall, Environmental Specialist Senior, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 515-491-2226.

Operation Dry Water starts July 1

DES MOINES - A group of state, federal and local law enforcement agencies will partner to focus enforcement of Iowa's boating while intoxicated law as part of the national Operation Dry Water campaign to draw public attention to the hazards of boating under the influence.

"We will conduct boating while intoxicated focused enforcement statewide with increased patrols, check points, and be administering breath tests and working to inform the public on the hazards involved on the waters across Iowa," said Susan Stocker, boating law administrator and education coordinator for the Iowa DNR.

Operation Dry Water is July 1-3.

"One-third of all boating fatalities nationally involved alcohol and many of those victims were innocent bystanders," she said.

"The effects of alcohol can be intensified when combined with wind and wave action and an extended time spent in the sun. Operators may not think they are under the influence, but their judgment, reaction time, balance and vision indicate that they are," Stocker said.

In 2022, the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and its partners contacted more than 1,425 vessels containing 5,253 boaters resulting in 533 citations or warnings as part of Operation Dry Water.

The DNR has partnered with the U.S. Coast Guard, the Army Corps of Engineers, and local police and sheriff's departments as part of previous Operation Dry Water campaigns.

2022 top areas for BWI arrests

- Okoboji: 7
- Coralville Reservoir: 6
- Mississippi River: 5
- Missouri River: 5
- Rathbun Reservoir: 5
- Total BWI: 36

2021 top areas for BWI arrests

- Mississippi River: 8
- Coralville Reservoir: 6
- Missouri River: 3
- Okoboji: 3
- Rathbun Reservoir: 3
- Total BWI: 31

2020 top areas for BWI arrests

- Rathbun Reservoir: 8
- Mississippi River: 6
- Coralville Reservoir: 4
- Okoboji: 2
- Saylorville Reservoir: 2
- Total BWI: 26

2019 top areas for BWI arrests

- Mississippi River: 22
- Coralville Reservoir: 15
- Saylorville Reservoir: 10
- Cedar River: 5
- Lake Manawa: 2
- Total BWI: 66

2018 top areas for BWI arrests:

- Saylorville Reservoir: 9
- Coralville Reservoir: 5
- Lake Manawa: 5
- Okoboji: 5
- Lake Panorama: 4
- Total BWI: 39

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

Help stop aquatic hitchhikers this Fourth of July

The Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) encourages all boaters and anglers to check for unwanted hitchhikers on their boats and equipment this Fourth of July to help protect Iowa lakes and streams.

Aquatic invasive species move from one water body to another by hitchhiking on boats, in bait buckets and on other equipment used in the water. They can create serious problems for Iowa waters and negatively impact the quality of outdoor recreation experiences.

"Aquatic invasive species can reduce native species and make lakes and rivers unusable for boaters, anglers and swimmers," said Kim Bogenschutz, aquatic invasive species coordinator for the Iowa DNR.

These invasive species often grow quickly and spread fast when brought to another lake or stream due to a lack of natural predators or competitors.

Boaters and anglers can help prevent the spread of aquatic invasive species to new water bodies by cleaning, draining and drying their boats and equipment after each time on the water.

- 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 water body unless they came out of that waterbody and always empty unwanted bait in the trash.

It is illegal to possess or transport prohibited aquatic invasive species or 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.

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

Learn more about aquatic invasive species, including 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.

Major restoration effort to improve Black Hawk Lake nearing completion

LAKE VIEW – A second and final season of dredging on Black Hawk Lake, located in Sac County, is scheduled to end the week of June 18th. An additional two to three weeks of site clean-up and contractor demobilization will follow the dredging work.

The Ice House Point portion of Black Hawk State Park, which includes the public boat ramp on the south shore, will be closed for a minimum of three days during

the week of June 25. The contractor will demobilize the dredge and in-lake pipe during this time and remove all remaining equipment used for the project after the 4th of July holiday.

Boaters and other lake users should use caution while navigating Black Hawk Lake during completion of the dredging effort. The dredge barge and pipeline will be clearly marked with buoys and lights. Maintain a minimum of 200 feet distance from all equipment and pipelines. Do not attempt to cross the dredge pipeline, even if it is submerged.

The dredging work completed at Black Hawk Lake will improve overall water quality, fish habitat and recreational opportunities. An area approximately 174 acres in the eastern main basin of the lake was deepened to nine feet, removing about 750,000 cubic yards of material from the lake. Dredging will help manage aquatic vegetation in the main basin of the lake, reduce re-suspension of sediments due to wind and wave action, and remove high-phosphorus sediments.

Media Contact: Ben Wallace, Fisheries Biologist, Black Hawk District Office, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 712-657-2638 or ben.wallace@dnr.iowa.gov.

Iowa's Scholastic Clay Target Program crowns youth sporting clays champions

Athletes from 33 Iowa teams participated in the 2023 Iowa Scholastic Clay Target Program (SCTP) Sporting Clays Championships, June 15-17, at Black Oak Clays, near Pella.

The course was set by Dave Koch, of Little Fox River Sporting Clays, in Missouri.

Carson Finney of the Ankeny Centennial Jaguars repeated as a three-time state champion for the men's varsity division. The Ankeny Jaguars Shooting Sports team also took home first place varsity squad in sporting clays, while Megan Vos from the Oskaloosa Shooting Team won the Ladies Varsity Division. The PC Eagles won the Junior Varsity Squad Division. Find the complete list of all results online at <https://app.sssfonline.com/nationals/3722>.

Men's Varsity Individual Sporting Clays

1. Carson Finney, Ankeny Centennial Jaguars
2. Logan Sease, Ankeny Centennial Jaguars
3. Carter Miller, AGWSR Cougars
4. Logan Bruxvoort, Pella Shooters Club
5. Will Reaman, Ankeny Centennial Jaguars
6. Carson Abrams, PC Eagles

Women's Varsity Individual Sporting Clays

1. Megan Vos, Oskaloosa Shooting Team
2. Nikolle Kussatz, PC Eagles
3. Josey Ridley, Pella Shooters Club
4. Erin Mathes, Pella Shooters Club
5. Emma Adams, Oskaloosa Shooting Team
6. Samantha Kelchen, Ankeny Hawks Shooting Sports

Sporting Clays Varsity Squads

1. Ankeny Centennial Jaguars Iron Squad, 507 points
2. Pella Green Squad, 468 points
3. Oskaloosa Shooting Team, 466 points
4. PC Eagles, 462 points
5. Underwood Youth Trap Club, 458 points

Iowa's SCTP teams will attend the last competition of the season, June 22-25, at the New Pioneer Gun Club in Waukee, for the Iowa Scholastic Clay Target Program Skeet Championship.

For more information on the Scholastic Clay Target Program in Iowa, contact Chris Van Gorp, DNR Shooting Sports Coordinator at 515-313-8048 or chris.vangorp@dnr.iowa.gov.