



IOWA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Iowa DNR News

Conservation and Recreation

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- [Diverse and unique, Dugout Creek-Yager Slough wildlife area packs a lot into 1,600 acres](#)
- [Pikes Peak State Park campground to open July 27](#)
- [Lake Keomah State Park restoration being planned](#)
- [Iowa pheasant population survey begins Aug. 1](#)
- [Learn to Hunt program opens registration for youth waterfowl workshop](#)
- [DNR seeks comment on proposed publicly owned lakes watershed program rule revisions](#)
- [2023 volunteer fire department – wildland fire assistance grants available](#)

Diverse and unique, Dugout Creek-Yager Slough wildlife area packs a lot into 1,600 acres



Prairie at Dugout Creek, in Dickinson County. Photo courtesy of the Iowa DNR.

Dugout Creek-Yager Slough wildlife areas south of Lake Park, in western Dickinson County, is home to an array of marshes plus two unique and rare habitat

types in the state - one of the largest and highest quality wetland fen complexes in Iowa and high-quality remnant prairie.

Unique and rare, fens are a type of wetland featuring groundwater flowing sideways, and percolating to the surface on a hillside through a layer of peat. Fens require thousands of years to develop, supporting many rare plants.

On the surface, fens feel spongy, like a waterbed. At Dugout Creek-Yager Slough, fens follow the natural drainage, seeping from the hillsides.

The rolling prairie and wetlands complex covers more than 1,600 acres, and is home to rare species, including silverweed, arrowgrass, lesser bladderwort and slender arrowgrass. Black terns and northern harriers are here, as are regal fritillaries and Arogos skippers.

To maintain this highly diverse and unique area, staff with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources Great Lakes Wildlife Unit will manipulate the marshes water levels annually to encourage vegetation and to protect the water quality in the wetlands and apply prescribed fire on different segments to manage the prairie.

“Part of Dugout Creek and Yager Slough are federal waterfowl production areas which requires disturbance on 25 percent of the acreage annually and we accomplish that through fire and through targeted haying and grazing with a local producer,” said Chris LaRue, wildlife biologist for the area. “We try to burn 200 or more acres each year for native prairie and grassland management, to meet long term management goals within this unique complex.”

On this nearly cloudless late June morning, bobolinks, dickcissels and meadowlarks can be heard from the prairie. Leadplant, pale purple coneflower, rattlesnake master, indigo, purple prairie clover can be seen.

The area is home to multiple trumpeter swan nests and, recently, to nesting sandhill cranes. Great blue herons, Canada geese and various ducks are gathered on the largely drained 90-acre wetland, that had been lowered to eliminate a carp population. Carp uproot aquatic plants which degrades water quality, and making the wetlands supportive for waterfowl, shorebirds and other wildlife.

Dugout Creek and Yager Slough is dotted with small wetlands ranging from one to 12 acres. A few larger ones ranging from 30 to 40 acres, and the largest, 90 acres. A mix of restored and remnant prairie covers the rolling hills, filling the picturesque landscape with wildflowers and grasses. This complex has always been a popular pheasant hunting area and, occasionally, gray partridge.

Iowa Lakes Community College has an ongoing blanding's turtle study that includes Dugout Creek and Yager Slough. Students at Lakeside Lab tour the area for hands on learning about these ecological sites.

The Iowa DNR has partnered with Pheasants Forever, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation, Ducks Unlimited and more to support

the wetland and upland complex that is Dugout Creek – Yager Slough wildlife area.

Fens

The Iowa DNR's John Pearson and Mark Leoschke conducted an extensive study of Iowa fens between 1986 and 1991 and found more than 200 fens in varying condition.

In their 1992 article, Floristic Composition and Conservation Status of Fens in Iowa, *Journal of the Iowa Academy of Science: JIAS* Volume 99, Number 2-3, Article 3, they found about half of the fens supported plant species considered endangered, threatened, or special concern or rare. Approximately 25 fens were outstanding conservation prospects with intact vegetation, high species richness, and rare species. Nearly 40 percent of all potential fen sites had been destroyed by cultivation or drainage; another 30 percent were unknown due to lack of a field visit, but most appear on aerial photographs to be very small, disturbed fragments.

Media Contact: Chris La Rue, Wildlife Biologist, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 712-330-4543.

Pikes Peak State Park campground to open July 27

MACGREGOR – The Iowa DNR is re-opening the newly renovated Pikes Peak State Park campground on July 27. Campers will enjoy upgraded camping amenities, along with the ability to make same-day reservations at all campsites.

According to Detra Dettmann, northeast supervisor for the DNR State Parks, Forests and Preserves Bureau, new park improvements include: larger sites with pull-through capabilities at most of the 60 campsites; full hook-up electrical with 50-amp service at six campsites, and standard electric at the remaining sites; along with newly paved roads and parking lots. Park staff are still working on grass establishment in the campground.

All campsites will be reservable through the state park reservation site, with the ability to make same-day reservations. Site availability will be known in real-time online, including recent cancellations. This is a change from most other state park campgrounds that have a two-day reservation window.

“Same-day reservations have been well received at the other state parks that have made this change,” said Dettmann. “Now campers will know exactly what sites are available in real time, helping them to save time and plan their trips.”

Campers can start making reservations online for Pikes Peak State Park at 9 a.m. on July 27, with the same-day window closing at 11:59 p.m. each day. The “iron ranger,” where paper reservations were inserted at the campground kiosk, has been removed. Campers driving to the park looking for walk-in reservations will be

directed to make their reservation online while onsite. Reservations will be accepted through the end of November, with the campground closing over the winter from December through February.

Reservations can be made at <https://iowastateparks.reserveamerica.com/>, or by calling (877) 427-2757. The website includes updated photos of every campsite at the Pikes Peak State Park campground.

Media Contact: Detra Dettmann, Northeast District Supervisor, State Parks, Forests and Preserves Bureau, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 563-608-4597 or Detra.Dettmann@dnr.iowa.gov

Lake Keomah State Park restoration being planned

OSKALOOSA – Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and other project partners are planning a lake restoration project at Lake Keomah State Park to improve water quality and recreational opportunities.

Construction is scheduled to start in the fall of 2024 and continue into the spring of 2026. Planned improvements include additional watershed practices to protect the lake, stabilizing the shoreline, dredging in targeted areas, upgrading the boat ramp and trail, improving fish habitat and removing common carp and grass carp.

DNR will hold a public meeting late this fall to present preliminary restoration plans and solicit feedback from park users. The campground and lodge will remain open throughout the project. Access to the lake may be limited during construction.

Park staff remain busy this summer welcoming visitors and implementing the park's forest management plan, which includes removing invasive species, managing desirable trees and creating prairie plantings.

The forest management plan has been supported by Vermeer Corporation with more than \$1 million in time, fuel and equipment donations during the last five years. Forest restoration improves wildlife habitat and promotes better water quality in the lake, reducing erosion from bare forest floor soils into Lake Keomah.

"Taking care of our woodlands and natural resources is an important goal for us to ensure Lake Keomah remains a beautiful, unique area," said Chad Malone, Lake Keomah State Park ranger.

To make a camping reservation and to learn more about Lake Keomah and Iowa State Parks, visit www.iowadnr.gov/parks.

Media Contact – George Antoniou, Lake Restoration Program Coordinator, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 515-201-6775 or george.antoniou@dnr.iowa.gov.

Iowa pheasant population survey begins Aug. 1

Pheasant hunters in the northern half of Iowa had an excellent season last year, and many are looking forward to what 2023 has in store. The fall forecast will be based on the Iowa Department of Natural Resources' (DNR) annual roadside pheasant counts, that begins Aug. 1.

The statewide survey is conducted by Iowa DNR staff between Aug. 1-15, who drive 218, 30-mile routes on gravel roads at dawn on mornings with heavy dew. Hen pheasants will move their broods to the edge of the gravel road to dry off before they begin feeding, which makes them easier to count.

In June the DNR issued its annual prediction for the roadside counts, which uses a weather model based on the snowfall, rainfall and temperatures from the past winter and spring. The model provides a best guess at what the counts might look like, and it is predicting numbers to be better than last year. And that is good news for hunters.

But the best indicator for the fall season is the August roadside survey that counts actual pheasants seen along more than 6,000 miles of rural, gravel roads.

The August roadside survey has been conducted over the same routes since 1962. In addition to pheasants and quail, the survey collects data on partridge, cottontails and jackrabbits. Results will be posted online at www.iowadnr.gov/pheasantsurvey in early September. Iowa's pheasant season begins Oct. 28.

MEDIA CONTACT: Todd Bogenschutz, Upland Wildlife Biologist, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 515-979-0828.

Learn to Hunt program opens registration for youth waterfowl workshop

Polk City, Iowa - The Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is offering a program to teach skills needed to hunt, field dress and cook waterfowl to youth who have little to no waterfowl hunting experience on Aug. 26, at the Olofson Shooting Range, near Polk City.

The workshop will feature knowledge and skills building sessions with hands-on learning as well as a live-fire wingshooting.

“For those interested in the challenge of waterfowl hunting as a means of sourcing their own protein, this program provides the opportunity to learn the skills and knowledge it takes to do it all yourself,” said Jamie Cook, program coordinator with the Iowa DNR.

Participants will learn basic strategies for hunting waterfowl such as proper equipment, where to hunt, safe shooting practices, and how to field dress, butcher and cook the ducks and geese. The wingshooting session will provide lessons on shooting techniques and range time for those looking to improve their shooting skills.

The course runs from 2 to 7 p.m., and is designed for participants 8 years of age and older. The cost is \$20 for the course and includes a meal and a youth membership to Delta Waterfowl. Space is limited so early registration is encouraged. Youth must be accompanied by a parent or legal guardian.

For more information or to begin the registration process, go to <https://tinyurl.com/4pam7e25>

The program is provided through a partnership with the Iowa DNR and Delta Waterfowl. It is part of a national effort to recruit, retain and reactivate hunters due to the overall decline in hunting and outdoor recreation.

Media Contact: Jamie Cook, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 515-350-8091.

DNR seeks comment on proposed publicly owned lakes watershed program rule revisions

The Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is seeking informal comments on administrative rules for the Publicly Owned Lakes Watershed Program (Chapter 31).

Executive Order 10 (EO10), signed by Governor Reynolds on January 10, 2023, requires all state agencies to identify which administrative rule chapters will be retained or rescinded. The EO10 process includes public engagement with the opportunity for meaningful input.

The Iowa DNR has reviewed the above-mentioned rule chapter. Chapter 31 has been revised to eliminate redundancies and improve efficiency.

The public are invited to provide informal comments on the proposed rule changes. DNR will accept written comments through August 4, 2023. Written comments or questions regarding the proposed rules should be submitted to:

george.antoniou@dnr.iowa.gov. Comments should be made to specific portions of the rules.

After receiving and reviewing informal comments, the DNR will create a draft Regulatory Analysis and draft Notice of Intended Action. The DNR will host a formal public comment period for these drafts, followed by a public hearing, in September 2023.

Versions of the rules, including a “clean” copy and a version showing revisions, can be found on the DNR webpage: <https://www.iowadnr.gov/About-DNR/About-DNR/Administrative-Rules>.

2023 volunteer fire department – wildland fire assistance grants available

The Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Forestry - Fire Program, working in coordination with the US Forest Service, has grant money available for Iowa’s rural fire departments to help battle wildfires.

Applications are due on Oct. 16. The grant provides 50 percent reimbursement for wildland fire equipment with a maximum reimbursement grant of \$4,500 per department.

The grants offer funding assistance for wildfire suppression equipment, slide-in units, hoses, nozzles, adapters, portable tanks and pumps, personal protective equipment and communications equipment. Additionally, if a fire department has a special need that can be tied directly to wildfire suppression, this grant allows for such special requests.

Gail Kantak, state wildland fire supervisor for the Iowa DNR, said fire departments should send her a Wildland Fire Report whenever they respond to a wildland fire or provide assistance to a prescribed or controlled wildland fire. Departments actively returning these reports receive priority points in the Volunteer Fire Assistance grant application scoring process.

All Iowa volunteer fire departments were mailed information about the 2023 Volunteer Fire Assistance Grant. The grant application package and the Wildland Fire Report form are available online at www.iowadnr.gov/fire.

For more information, contact Gail Kantak at gail.kantak@dnr.iowa.gov or 515-689-0083.