



IOWA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

# Iowa DNR News

Conservation and Recreation

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Aug. 8, 2023**

- [How Do You Outdoors? Visit the Iowa DNR building at the Iowa State Fair for a chance to win prizes and more](#)
- [Invasive aquatic plants confirmed at West Okoboji Lake](#)
- [Big Creek Wildlife Area is hidden in plain sight](#)
- [Iowa DNR to host open house on Gull Point State Park improvement plans](#)

## **How Do You Outdoors? Visit the Iowa DNR building at the Iowa State Fair for a chance to win prizes and more**

**DES MOINES** - Visit the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) building at the Iowa State Fair, August 10 - 20, for a chance to win prizes, talk to DNR experts, attend an outdoor-themed presentation, and more.

With the theme “How Do You Outdoors?,” visitors can vote for their favorite outdoor activity at the different stations throughout the building, including hunting, fishing, archery, hiking, camping, boating, watching wildlife, backyard care, snowmobiling, riding OHVs, and helping the environment. Votes cast each day will be placed into a drawing for the corresponding theme day prize package. Every vote counts as an entry for the grand prize. Prize packages donated by several outdoor recreation and conservation organizations and businesses range in value from \$500 to \$2000.

- Thursday, Aug. 10 - How Do You Fish? Prize Package
- Friday, Aug. 11 - How Do You Watch Wildlife? Prize Package
- Saturday, Aug. 12 - How Do You Target? Prize Package
- Sunday, Aug. 13 - How Do You Help the Environment? Prize Package
- Monday, Aug. 14 - How Do You Camp? Prize Package
- Tuesday, Aug. 15 - How Do You Hunt? Prize Package
- Wednesday, Aug. 16 - How Do You Protect Water Quality? Prize Package
- Thursday, Aug. 17 - How Do You Boat? Prize Package
- Friday, Aug. 18 - How Do You Hike? Prize Package
- Saturday, Aug. 19 - How Do You Watch Wildlife? Prize Package

- Sunday, Aug. 20 - How Do You Backyard? Prize Package
- Grand Prize - How Do You Outdoors? Prize Package

Visitors can enjoy the popular fish aquariums that were just upgraded last summer, live turtles in the outdoor courtyard, purchase hunting licenses and tags or fishing licenses, or even purchase a one-year subscription to the DNR's Iowa Outdoors magazine for \$16 and receive a free t-shirt.

The courtyard provides a shady area with benches and picnic tables for families to enjoy. The courtyard stage will have several presentations by outdoor experts, including outdoor cooking, state park hidden secrets, wild game nutrition and sampling, backyard conservation, how to set up a campsite, and live animal demonstrations. Several hands-on and interactive activities will be available throughout the fair including the opportunity to try target shooting from 12 to 6 p.m. daily at the air rifle range in the courtyard.

Find the complete courtyard schedule, along with all the details about the DNR fair displays and state fair promotions at [www.iowadnr.gov/statefair](http://www.iowadnr.gov/statefair).

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## Invasive aquatic plants confirmed at West Okoboji Lake

The Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) recently discovered Eurasian watermilfoil growing throughout the canals near Miller's Bay and The Harbor canals on West Okoboji Lake in Dickinson County. Brittle naiad was also found in the Triboji lagoon. No Eurasian watermilfoil or brittle naiad was found in the main lake of West Okoboji or the other lakes in the Iowa Great Lakes chain.

"We are developing a management plan and working with local stakeholders and communities to develop a plan of action for the coming weeks," said Mike Hawkins, fisheries biologist for the Iowa DNR. "We're getting permits in place in case the community and DNR decide that a herbicide treatment of the canals and lagoon is the best option."

The DNR is asking boaters and other users in these areas to be extra vigilant to help prevent the spread of these invasive aquatic plants elsewhere in West Okoboji or the other lakes in this chain.

“It is critical to clean all vegetation from boats and equipment before moving out of the canals and lagoon into the main lake to prevent the spread of Eurasian watermilfoil and brittle naiad into West Okoboji Lake,” said Kim Bogenschutz, the DNR’s aquatic invasive species program coordinator.

The Iowa DNR Aquatic Plant Management team monitors the vegetation in the Iowa Great Lakes each year. The monitoring has been especially important this summer. East Okoboji, Upper Gar, Minnewashta, and Lower Gar Lakes were aggressively treated with herbicide to eradicate Eurasian watermilfoil discovered in those lakes late last summer. The DNR worked closely with lake associations, cities, Dickinson County, and other organizations to develop and fund that treatment plan. Surveys conducted this week found no Eurasian watermilfoil growing in East Okoboji or the three lower chain lakes.

Eurasian watermilfoil, an invasive rooted aquatic plant native to parts of Europe and Asia, can spread quickly and outcompete beneficial native plants. It reproduces by fragmentation, which means small pieces of it grow into new plants and form thick beds.

Iowa’s Aquatic Invasive Species Program has been a national leader in control efforts to stop Eurasian watermilfoil for the past 30 years.

“Iowa DNR has successfully eradicated the plant in many lakes throughout the state. The size and complexity of the Iowa Great Lakes present real challenges for management,” explains Hawkins. “Lakes with healthy, diverse native aquatic plant communities may be less susceptible to an infestation that takes over the native plant community.”

“Boaters and anglers can unintentionally spread Eurasian watermilfoil, brittle naiad, and other aquatic invasive species if they do not take the proper precautions before going between lakes and after each time out on the water,” said Bogenschutz.

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 the boat and equipment before you leave a water body. With the current infestations in the canals and lagoon, you must also check boat props and other parts of the boat where vegetation fragments could get caught before entering the main lake.
- DRAIN water from all equipment (motor, live well, bilge, transom well, bait bucket) before you leave a water body.
- 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, 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 water body and empty unwanted bait in the trash.

It is illegal to possess or transport prohibited aquatic invasive species, such as Eurasian watermilfoil, in Iowa. Boaters must also drain all water from boats and equipment before leaving a water access and must keep drain plugs removed or opened during transport.

Find more information about aquatic invasive species and a list of infested waters in the 2023 Iowa Fishing Regulations booklet or on the DNR's website at [www.iowadnr.gov/ais](http://www.iowadnr.gov/ais).

**Media Contacts:** Mike Hawkins, Spirit Lake Fish Management Biologist at 712-336-1840 or Jason Euchner, Aquatic Vegetation Management Biologist at 515-432-2823.

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## Big Creek Wildlife Area is hidden in plain sight

Often overlooked for its similarly named state park or mistaken for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers sprawling Saylorville Wildlife Area, Big Creek Wildlife Area is roughly 3,100-acre, one stop outdoor shop just 10 minutes from Ankeny.

It features remnant and reconstructed prairie, mature hardwood forest, small sediment basins for remote, hike-in fishing, and huge blocks of contiguous forest with no roads or lanes to break it up.

And it has an 815-acre lake that is part of one of the busiest state parks in Iowa.

“Everybody thinks of it as the state park, but the majority of the area is part of the wildlife area, including the lake,” said Josh Gansen, wildlife biologist with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Saylorville Wildlife Unit.

Although part of the most populated county in Iowa, a network of gravel roads in and around Big Creek Wildlife Area give the feeling of being far away from urban life.

The gravel roads lead to out-of-the-way parking lots where anglers can hike in to the sediment ponds to fish for bluegills and bass, or visitors can enjoy rolling prairies and mature timber. The sediment ponds are part of a water quality project completed a few years ago that added two ponds on the area and renovated a third pond.

Today, overlooking one of the prairies, framed by the lake in the background, false indigo, pale purple coneflower, Indian grass, little and big bluestem and compass

plant are all showing. To maintain the prairies, wildlife staff use different methods to prevent tree and brush encroachment, including mechanical tree removal where needed, and prescribed fire.

The management plan includes rotating fire among the different prairies so that each prairie and grassland is burned every five years or so, which supports grassland birds and upland hunting.

Following the gravel roads west, the landscape changes to timber. The largest section of Big Creek consists of huge blocks of contiguous forest connecting Big Creek to the Saylorville Wildlife Area and to the Des Moines River. The mature hardwood forests support quality deer and turkey hunting.

Gansen said Big Creek Wildlife Area's proximity to Des Moines creates the misperception that the public area is overrun with people, but that's not the case.

"People may shy away from it because of how close it is to the metro but there is a lot of opportunity here," he said. "You could come here on the pheasant opener and the competition is nothing like there is on the big grasslands."

As if on cue, a rooster pheasant ran across the gravel road ahead of Gansen's truck.

"It's not a specialized area – you can hunt all species here," he said.

The upper end of Big Creek Lake offers duck and goose hunting. There are a handful of fields managed specifically to provide dove hunting, including a 10-acre sunflower field. Other fields have rye or winter wheat that will be mowed to scatter the seeds, then burned to remove the cover. Doves prefer bare ground.

The state park is a wildlife refuge where hunting is not permitted.

And there is always top-notch fishing in Big Creek Lake, but that's another story.

### **Etcetera**

- For paddlers, there is a fairly well protected canoe launch in the far north arm that feeds into the main lake.
- A training area for bird dogs is available near the park.
- There is an 11-mile marked snowmobile trail that winds through the park as well as groomed cross-country ski trails.
- Just off NW Madrid Drive is the Olofson shooting range, offering rifle, handgun, trap and skeet, and hunter safety classes.

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## Iowa DNR to host open house on Gull Point State Park improvement plans

Milford -- The Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is hosting an open house to discuss renovation and improvement plans for Gull Point State Park, at 6:30 p.m., Aug. 22, at Gull Point State Park Lodge. The public is invited to attend.

The DNR will share preliminary plans for renovations that include re-paving park roads, upgrading campground infrastructure, installing a new restroom facility and improving accessibility.

The address for the lodge is 1500 Harpen Street, Milford.

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