



IOWA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Iowa DNR News

Conservation and Recreation

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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- [Experience the rugged beauty of the Loess Hills at Green Hollow and Blackburn areas](#)
- [Lend a hand in a state park at Statewide Volunteer Day on Sept. 23](#)
- [Fall webworm abundant in southern Iowa this fall](#)

Experience the rugged beauty of the Loess Hills at Green Hollow and Blackburn areas



The terrain at Green Hollow Wildlife Area and Blackburn Wildlife Area and State Park is rugged – rolling hills, canyons and 30-foot sheer cliffs – with roughly 3.5 miles of unmarked, overgrown maintenance lanes available for hiking deep into the timber. Photo courtesy of the Iowa DNR.

Tucked in to the southern end of the Loess Hills, within eyeshot of I-29 and nearly adjacent to Forney Lake, is the Green Hollow and Blackburn wildlife areas and state park complex in northwest Fremont County.

While not far off the interstate, actually *finding* the complex has a little “am I going the right way?” feel to it.

East through Thurman and north off of Plum Creek Road, on to a low maintenance “gravel” road that leads to the parking lot to Green Hollow Wildlife Area and, further back, to Blackburn State Park.

The relatively new 807-acre complex took shape after William and Sara Blackburn donated 151 acres in the Loess Hills to the Iowa Department of Natural Resources in 2019. The Blackburn donation was divided into Blackburn State Park (72 acres) and Blackburn Wildlife Area (79 acres).

The Blackburn Wildlife Area links two parcels of Green Hollow creating nearly 2.5 miles of continuous public hunting land.

The terrain here is rugged – rolling hills, canyons and 30-foot sheer cliffs – with roughly 3.5 miles of unmarked, overgrown maintenance lanes available for hiking deep into the timber. These views are only seen by hikers and hunters willing to go off the beaten path.

The maintenance lane follows a narrow ridge to the northwest. The open understory makes seeing wildlife, hiking and hunting easier and more enjoyable. The DNR has developed a forest wildlife stewardship plan for the Loess Hills timber supporting red oaks, black oaks, bur oaks and chinkapin oaks that produce acorns which, in turn, support wildlife.

“It’s a nice walk in the oak timber and you’re not likely to see anyone else,” said Matt Dollison, wildlife biologist with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources Nishnabotna Unit. Pro tip – when walking through the timber, wave a stick head high out front to avoid walking through spiderwebs.

This is deer and turkey country that is a popular spot with squirrel hunters. A local producer works with the Iowa DNR to plant and manage the corn and soybean food plots and hayfields as part of an ag lease.

At the state park, a universally accessible platform by the pavilion extends into the timber providing unobstructed views into the forest. There is a vault latrine, but no water and visitors must carry out their trash. The pavilion and platform were constructed by the Blackburns and included as part of their donation.

Blackburn State Park has a mile-long marked and maintained hiking trail (no map) and features restored prairie on the ridges. Today, white wild indigo, partridge pea and whorled milkweed are showing in the mix of native grasses.

“William Blackburn did a good job with the prairie restoration,” Dollison said. “And the pavilion is a neat, out-of-the-way place for a family get together.”

Rare wildlife calls the area home

The Iowa DNR’s Multiple Species Inventory Monitoring Program, within the Wildlife Diversity section, visits Green Hollow annually to inventory species using the area and has confirmed some rare wildlife here.

Green Hollow supports the plains pocket mouse, western worm snake, northern prairie skink, least shrew, tri-colored bat, red-shouldered hawk, and rare butterfly’s hickory hairstreak, regal fritillary and zabulon skipper.

Media Contact: Matt Dollison, Wildlife Biologist, Nishnabotna Unit, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 712-350-0147.

Lend a hand in a state park at Statewide Volunteer Day on Sept. 23

Iowans are invited to lend a hand at the Iowa Department of Natural Resources' annual statewide Volunteer Day on Saturday, Sept. 23. Several parks and forests across the state will host volunteer events to help spruce up trails, buildings and other park amenities.

"Iowa state parks are beloved places for many Iowans, and we greatly appreciate the help volunteers provide," said Sherry Arntzen, chief of Iowa Parks, Forests and Preserves Bureau.

Clean-up efforts at Volunteer Day will be unique for each park and may include litter pick-up, staining or painting buildings, planting trees, clearing trails and more.

Citizens interested in volunteering can learn more at www.iowadnr.gov/volunteer. If weather looks inclement on Saturday, volunteers should contact the individual park office in case changes to date, time or meeting location for the event occur.

Fall webworm abundant in southern Iowa this fall

The fall webworm (*Hyphantria cunea*), a native moth of North America, is commonly found across Iowa during late summer and early fall.

"We expect higher populations of fall webworm south of Interstate 80," explains Tivon Feeley, Iowa DNR Forest Health forester.

The caterpillars of the moth spin webbed nests that cover the ends of tree branches, providing protection as they consume foliage. Dozens of caterpillars can be found in a single nest. Webbing can cover multiple branches and occasionally an entire tree.

Fall webworms are not picky eaters. Their webs can be found on a variety of hardwood trees such as hickory, walnut, birch, cherry and willow. As caterpillars mature, they abandon their host tree to search for protected locations to pupate during the winter. These spiky-haired caterpillars may be seen crawling on decks, houses and sidewalks, sometimes by the hundreds.

The webbing and defoliation caused by fall webworms is mostly aesthetic and rarely causes long-term damage to trees. An effective control method is to open the webbed nest with a long stick that has a nail driven through the end to expose the caterpillars to natural predators. Use caution when trying to open nests on branches that are difficult to reach. Never use fire to burn webs from trees as this can damage twigs and buds.

Fall webworm is often confused with the eastern tent caterpillar, which also builds silken tents in tree branches. Eastern tent caterpillars are found in spring and early summer.

Media Contact: Tivon Feeley, Forest Health Forester, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 515-669-1402.

