



IOWA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Iowa DNR News

Conservation and Recreation

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Cedar Valley Lakes Trail Reopening Ribbon Cutting Event

WATERLOO -- On Wednesday, Sept. 20, the Cedar Valley Trails Partnership and the Iowa DNR will host a celebration and ribbon cutting for the newly paved section of the Cedar Valley Lakes Trail from Krieg's Crossing to the George Wyth State Park Lodge. Through fundraising efforts by INRCOG, the DNR and Cedar Valley Trails Partnership, a grant was secured from the COVID Relief Recreational Trail Program to complete this 1.4-mile project.

The ribbon cutting will be held at 5:30 p.m. at the George Wyth Lodge in the state park. There will be a short program followed by refreshments and organized bike rides leaving on the trail at 5:45 p.m.

For more information visit <https://cedarvalleytrails.org/events>.

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Popular wildlife area emerges from historic 'Flood of '93'



The transformation at the West Fork Wildlife Area from unworkable floodplain farm ground to prairie, grassland, oak and riverine timber has been impressive. Especially for the local pheasant population. Photo courtesy of Iowa DNR.

West Fork Wildlife Area in Palo Alto County was developed after the historic flood of 1993, then expanded after the floods of 2018 and 2019 as landowners exited the floodplain.

Flooding disturbed the land to the point where it could no longer be farmed successfully, so, the Natural Resources Conservation Service partnered with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and Palo Alto County Conservation Board to enroll much of the impacted ground into the federal Emergency Watershed Protection program.

Today, the West Fork Wildlife Area is a hop-scotch of parcels stretching from three miles southwest of Emmetsburg to five miles northwest of town, mixed in with county managed public areas and private land enrolled in to the conservation reserve program. The combined state and county public land total covers more than 2,600 acres.

“The NRCS did a lot of work on the floodplain, creating shallow water excavations and removing unneeded drainage tile to restore wetlands as well as establishing native prairie species in drier areas,” said Rob Patterson, wildlife biologist with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources Prairie Lakes Unit.

The transformation from unworkable floodplain farm ground to prairie, grassland, oak and riverine timber has been impressive.

Especially for the local pheasant population.

“It does draw a lot of attention from hunters – both instate and out of state. We see about every license plate here,” Patterson said. “It’s a good place to hunt; we have a lot of pheasants here.”

Looking across the prairie on this August morning, monarchs are fluttering from flower to flower while a hen pheasant hurries her quail-sized brood of chicks down a lane, carefully avoiding the grasses heavy with dew. It's a good year here for showy tick trefoil.

On the northern most parcel, a bachelor group of three deer stand on a gravel lane with a pheasant next to them. That's West Fork in a nutshell, Patterson said.

"It's pretty unique to have timber, riverine timber and grassland next to each other – on an area of this size," he said. "It's definitely one of our better areas."

After the initial acquisition following the 1993 floods, the DNR planted an oak stand on a portion of the area through a direct nut seeding, and 25 years later, a young stand of 20-foot-tall oaks are there. Patterson said they did another seeding a few years ago with the goal of establishing mast producing trees on the area.

While the management plan includes oaks on certain areas, the majority of West Fork is managed as a grassland and the Prairie Lakes crew work to remove cottonwoods and willows through a combination of cutting, spraying, and fire. The DNR works with two neighboring landowners to plant and maintain food plots and to help with the prairie mowing.

It's one of the more popular spots for doves and for dove hunting, especially when the sunflowers turn out.

Named for the West Fork of the Des Moines River that sits just east of the wildlife area, this section of river is stocked annually each spring with recently hatched walleyes. There are four river accesses in Palo Alto County and just to the north, in Emmet County, is the West Fork Water Trail.

Its proximity to Emmetsburg is attractive to hunters because of the hotel and restaurant options. Nearby Five Island Lake on the north edge of Emmetsburg offers additional lake fishing, beaches and a campground.

West Fork supports diverse wildlife community

The Iowa DNR's Multiple Species Inventory Monitoring Program, within the Wildlife Diversity section, visits West Fork annually to inventory species using the area.

The surveys have confirmed seven different bat species, including the tri-colored bat, silver-haired bat and northern long-eared bat; northern redbellied snake, spiny soft-shelled turtle, western fox snake, eastern gray treefrog, copes gray treefrog, tiger salamander and northern prairie skink. It also supports a number of bird species including northern harriers, common yellowthroat, dickcissels, bobolink, eastern and western meadowlarks, grasshopper sparrow, Henslow's sparrow and more.

Media Contact: Rob Patterson, Wildlife Biologist, Prairie Lakes Unit, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 712-330-2563.

Secluded Winford Wildlife Area supports quality deer and pheasant populations

That narrow access lane off a dead-end road is the only way in and out of the Winford Wildlife Area, a 637-acre floodplain grassland, just north of Oskaloosa.

The public wildlife area was created after the Skunk River blew out a levee in 2008 and flooded adjacent crop fields.

These fields had been farmed since the early 1900s, but the levee giving out was the final straw. Farmers working the sandy, silty soils decided it was time to get rid of the headache and enroll this land into the Wetland Reserve Program.

The first parcel was acquired by the Iowa Department of Natural Resources in 2012; the second in 2016. The new public area was named for an old crossing on the Skunk River, just to the west.

“These bottomland areas take a lot of work, depending on what we want them to be – a grassland or in trees,” said Jeff Glaw, wildlife biologist for the Iowa DNR’s Sugema Unit. “In this case, we wanted it to be mostly grassland.”

He said work started in earnest when the DNR contracted with a company to spray 300 acres of small willows, cottonwoods and maples from a helicopter in early September 2018. They left 150 acres of trees to create a riparian corridor.

Prescribed fire is used to manage the grassland areas to slow down invasive Reed canary grass and this past year, 500 acres here were burned. “With the dry weather this year, we met our objectives with our controlled burn” he said.

Staff will use a grinder to remove trees that reappear in the grassland.

The results from the spraying, grinding and fire is a highly productive public area supporting a quality deer and pheasant population. On this sweltering late August morning, birds are singing and a few young deer just east of the parking lot keep a cautious eye on the unwanted visitors.

“This area has some of the better pheasant counts in my district and has some really nice deer in there,” Glaw said.

He said he gets phone calls asking about Winford because of its size and location in Mahaska County.

“When you look at it from an aerial photo, it’s a habitat oasis surrounded by ag fields,” he said. “It hasn’t been around very long but people are finding it.”

Although Iowa is currently in the middle of a significant drought, the Winford area does have a number of old oxbows and shallow basins that hold water if and when it floods.

“When it floods all the basins hold water and attracts puddle ducks,” he said. “On the right year, with annual vegetation growth and water in there, it could be amazing.”

Discounted trees available at distribution events this fall

The Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR), through a partnership with the USDA Forest Service, is offering a mixture of hardwoods, low-growing ornamental

and evergreen tree species for \$25 each.

All Iowa residents can purchase up to two trees to be picked up at the following locations:

- Tuesday, October 3, 4:30-6:30 p.m., Jefferson County Conservation (2003 Libertyville Rd, Fairfield)
- Tuesday, October 10, 4:00-6:00 p.m., Waterloo Leisure Services (1101 Campbell Avenue, Waterloo)
- Thursday, October 12, 4:30-6:30 p.m., Swan Lake State Park Nature Center (22676 Swan Lake Drive, Carroll)
- Tuesday, October 17, 4:30-6:30 p.m., Fort Des Moines Park (7200 SE 5th St, Des Moines)

Submit an order form, available online

at www.iowadnr.gov/Conservation/Forestry/Urban-Forestry/Residential-Tree-Programs, to reserve your trees.

Media Contact: Shaila Claibourn, Urban and Community Forestry Technician, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 515-381-8876 or shaila.claibourn@dnr.iowa.gov.

State Preserves Advisory Board to meet Sept. 26

The State Preserves Advisory Board of the Iowa Department of Natural Resources will meet at 8:00 a.m., September 26, at the DNR Upper Maquoketa Wildlife Unit Headquarters, 1282 120th Street, Strawberry Point, IA 52076.

A field tour of White Pine Hollow State Preserve will be held on Monday, September 25 from noon to 5:00 p.m. Meet at the south entrance on the north end of White Pine Lane, 2 miles west of Luxemburg off Highway 3. Members of the public are welcome to attend.

The meeting is open to the public. Any person attending the public meeting and has special requirements such as those related to mobility or hearing impairments should contact the DNR or ADA Coordinator at 515-725-8200, Relay Iowa TTY Service 800-735-7942, or Webmaster@dnr.iowa.gov, and advise of specific needs.

The public can listen to the meeting via Google Meet at meet.google.com/qau-ztbg-anb or

by calling 401-903-2987 and entering the PIN of 728 796 957, followed by the pound (#) sign.

Members of the State Preserves Advisory Board are Kata McCarville, Steve Gustafson, Rick Cerwick, Amy Crouch, Perry Thostenson and Rhonda Kendrick. The Deputy Director of the DNR is Alex Moon.

The following is the September 26 agenda.

- Approve agenda
- Approve minutes of past meeting

- Consolidation of the State Preserves Advisory Board with the Natural Resource Commission
- Crossman Prairie and Hoffman Prairie state preserves - request from the Iowa Chapter of the Nature Conservancy to transfer ownership and management to the Iowa Department of Natural Resources
- White Pine Hollow forest management plan
- White Pine Hollow waypoint signage request to facilitate emergency response to rescue lost hikers and hunters

A more detailed agenda is available on the Iowa DNR's website at www.iowadnr.gov/spab.

For more information, contact John Pearson at 515-669-7614.

DNR to host open house to discuss Loess Hills State Forest Wildfire Restoration Plans

PISGAH -- The Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) will hold a public open house -- on Monday, Sept. 25, beginning at 6 p.m., at the Brent S. Olson Memorial Visitor Center, [206 Polk St., Pisgah, IA 51564](http://www.iowadnr.gov/pisgah) to discuss proposed restoration and management on the Preparation Canyon Unit of Loess Hills State Forest.

A significant portion of the Preparation Canyon Unit experienced a catastrophic wildfire on April 13, 2023. Damages caused by this wildfire have been evaluated and inventory data has been collected to guide restoration and management planning and implementation efforts.

DNR representatives will present information related to the extent of this wildfire and the damages that occurred as well as our plans on restoring and managing these areas to maximize benefits to wildlife and the public. An informal open house will follow where DNR staff will answer questions and discuss future plans with the public.

Media Contact: Jeff Seago, Area Forester, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 712-456-2924 or email: jeffrey.seago@dnr.iowa.gov