



IOWA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Iowa DNR News

Conservation and Recreation

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Harmon Lake Wildlife Area ready for a busy fall



Standing at the gravel boat ramp on the middle pool of Harmon Lake, among a dense stand of bur-reed full of seeds, four noisy trumpeter swans appeared over the trees then banked west at the sight of unwelcomed visitors.

Harmon Lake Wildlife Area is nearly 1,000 acres of prairie-wetland complex in northern Winnebago County anchored by three larger pools – west, middle and east – with the middle pool identified as a sovereign lake when the state was settled.

The area has been the site of various research projects throughout its history, including participating in a national study on small white lady's-slipper orchid, and an Iowa study on mallards in the 1970s. It is home to Blandings turtles, long-tailed weasels, meadow jumping mice, northern harriers, sandhill cranes, grasshopper sparrows, bobolinks and more.

On this early September morning, TJ Herrick, wildlife biologist with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Clear Lake Unit, is walking on the bank separating the middle pool from the east pool. Two recently installed water control structures will allow the Iowa DNR to hold water in the east pool and manage the water level in the middle pool to improve the habitat benefitting wildlife.

"When we get water back, it will be great here," Herrick said, referencing the drought.

Heading west along the south edge of the area, a rooster pheasant cackled and flushed, flying south to the neighboring soybean field.

Here, prairie and wetlands are intertwined supporting deer, ducks, pheasants, doves and more. Bees and monarchs are moving from flower to flower in search of late summer nectar. The pothole wetlands are holding a few ducks. Prairie blazing star, goldenrod, big bluestem, Indian grass, heartleaf golden Alexander, sawtooth sunflower and side oats gramma are visible. Shining willow has been found in the most soils here.

Remnant prairie was found in the area around an old one room schoolhouse that once sat on the southwest corner.

Positioned closer to the Minnesota state line (two miles) than the nearest Iowa town – (Scarville, pop. 78), Harmon Lake doesn't receive a lot of hunting pressure.

"It's a long way from anywhere," Herrick said. "There's not much competition. You could hunt ducks here in the morning and pheasants in the afternoon or walk all day hunting pheasants."

Harmon Lake is within one-and-a-half miles of Good Neighbors Marsh which as well as other private land enrolled in the conservation reserve program. "It's not a habitat island or just one block of habitat, but is in proximity to other habitat that supports a variety of wildlife species," he said.

Media Contact: TJ Herrick, Wildlife Biologist, Iowa Department of Natural Resources Clear Lake Wildlife Unit, 641-425-2814.

Iowa's archery deer hunting season began Oct. 1



An estimated 60,000 hunters will be heading to the timber in the next few months with Iowa's archery deer season underway Oct. 1. With some careful planning and scouting, hunters can capitalize on the predictable behavior of deer in the early fall.

"Early season deer strategy is usually pretty straightforward—find the feeding areas and you'll find the deer," said Jace Elliott, state deer biologist for the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR). "Acorns, which are high in both carbohydrates and fats, are becoming a major food source that hunters would be wise to target in the early archery season."

Statewide, the acorn crop appears promising. Hunters should focus on species within the white oak family, which are typically among the first to drop their acorns. However, acorns of red oak species, which are slightly less preferred by deer due to a higher acid content, can still make up a sizable portion of a deer's daily diet and should not be overlooked.

With drier than average conditions during the growing season, many crop fields are on schedule for harvest early in the archery season. This will create more daytime deer activity in places archery hunters tend to target, such as timber stands and wooded edges.

Deer will begin changing their daily behavior as the breeding season, or rut, approaches in late October and November.

"The rut is when a lot of our hunters fill their tag on a buck," Elliott said. "Rutting bucks can be found moving at all times of the day in search of a doe, which means putting a lot of time in the stand can pay off in a big way during this time of year."

No matter the time of season, look for new signs of deer activity, like tracks, droppings, rubs or scrapes, to help with stand location and maximize time in the woods.

Iowa deer population slightly increasing

The results of Iowa's annual spring spotlight survey indicate the population has slightly increased over the last several years, said Elliott, who coordinates the project.

"Our estimates can be variable from year to year, but for the past several years, the population has been relatively stable," he said.

He said the deer data shows statewide trends are stable to slightly increasing, which means opportunities to fill the freezer persist in every part of Iowa.

Bowhunters hunt a lot

Bowhunters fall on the avid range of the participation scale. Based on the annual bowhunter survey, they go out an average of 13 trips per year and spend an average of 3-1/2 hours per trip. They tend to be more selective and harvest fewer does than other regular deer seasons.

Bowhunters get the privilege of hunting during the breeding season, or rut, when adult bucks tend to be very active and vulnerable to harvest during daylight hours. However, this privilege comes at a cost—responsible bowhunters must spend countless off-season hours practicing and fine-tuning their weapons to make ethical shots when the opportunity comes. Despite being required to use more primitive weapons than deer hunters in the muzzleloader or regular firearm seasons, about 35 percent of Iowa deer hunters participate in the archery season, which contributes about 20-25 percent of the overall deer harvest each year.

CWD sampling

While chronic wasting disease sample collection is often associated with the firearm seasons, the Iowa DNR does collect deer tissue samples during bow season as part of its statewide annual effort to monitor for the fatal disease.

"Submitting a deer during the archery season is the best chance to take advantage of the free testing we offer before county quotas are reached," Elliott said.

"Samples submitted in the early season also tend to have the speediest turnaround for test results, before the diagnostics lab gets bombarded with samples from the firearm seasons." Hunters willing to provide a sample are encouraged to contact their local wildlife biologist to arrange for the collection.

In the event that the county quota has been filled, or if the hunter is interested in testing a fawn or other nonpriority deer, hunters may choose to pay for their own test through a new partnership with the Iowa State University Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory.

Hunters will need to contact their local wildlife staff and ask how they can get their deer tested through the new hunter submitted option. The DNR will collect and submit the sample on their behalf. There is a \$25 fee for the laboratory to run the test. Results should be available within 2-3 weeks.

Changes to deer seasons

- The antlerless deer quota has been adjusted in 24 counties.
- Due to declining deer populations, Woodbury and Crawford counties were added to the “buck-only” list during the first shotgun season, meaning antlerless deer harvest is not permitted on general deer licenses in these counties from Dec. 2-6. Kossuth and Humboldt counties were removed from this list, opening up more antlerless harvest opportunities in light of recovering deer numbers.
- The Population Management January antlerless-only season will be offered in Allamakee, Winneshiek, Decatur, Appanoose, Monroe, Lucas and Wayne counties if the number of unsold antlerless licenses on the third Monday in December exceeds 100 tags. This season allows the use of any legal method of take, including shotguns, handguns, muzzleloaders, bows, crossbows, and center-fire rifles .223 and larger.
- The Excess Tag January antlerless-only season will be held in any county that still has unsold county antlerless tags by January 10. Only centerfire rifles .223 caliber and above are allowed during this season.
- A new requirement for hunters who harvest an antlered deer is reporting the length of the main beam of each antler.

Deer donation program

The Iowa DNR, the Food Bank of Iowa and 34 meat lockers are participating in the Help Us Stop Hunger program for 2023. Hunters are encouraged to contact a participating locker before they harvest a deer to see if the locker has any additional drop off instructions.

Hunters may also sign up as a deer donor with the Iowa Deer Exchange at www.iowadnr.gov/deer then scroll down to Iowa’s Deer Exchange Program link. There, donors can provide their information on what they are willing to donate. The database creates a map and table with information deer donors and deer recipients can use to get connected. Participants requesting venison far outnumber those willing to donate. There is no cost to participate. It is illegal to sell wild fish and game in Iowa.

Be sure to report your harvest

Hunters who harvest a deer are required to report their harvest by midnight on the day after it is tagged or before taking it to a locker or taxidermist. The hunter whose name is on the transportation tag is responsible for making the report. If no deer is harvested, no report is necessary.

Successful hunters have the option to report the harvest by texting the registration number to 1-800-771-4692 and follow the prompts, through the Go Outdoors Iowa app, online at www.iowadnr.gov, by phone at the number listed on the tag, or through a license vendor during their regular business hours.

Phone use while hunting

Reminder to hunters that the use of cellphones, one or two-way radios to communicate the location or direction of game or furbearing animals or to coordinate the movement of other hunters is prohibited.

Outside of very few and specific exceptions, modern technology, including social media and instant messaging apps, is not allowed to assist with the hunt.

Hunters are encouraged to keep their phone on their person and not in a backpack for safety reasons.

Don't Veer for Deer

The combination of dropping temperatures and crop harvest across Iowa will likely get deer moving early this year. With the peak of the deer breeding activity still more than a month away, drivers need to remain vigilant with their defensive driving skills.

"Deer can be unpredictable when it comes to roadways, so don't assume that a deer won't jump out in front of your vehicle just because it sees you," explains Elliott. "This is the time of year when a lot of deer crashes happen, and many of those could have been avoided by a few simple precautions. Always keep your eyes on the road and maintain an appropriate speed. If a deer jumps onto the roadway, don't veer or try to avoid it, but brake firmly while staying in your lane."

If a deer is spotted in a ditch or roadside, drivers should always assume there are others nearby and drive accordingly, Elliott said.

Media Contact: Jace Elliott, State Deer Biologist, Wildlife Bureau, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 515-249-7056.

Public meeting to discuss proposed bass regulation changes at Swan Lake in Carroll County

CARROLL - The Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) will host a public meeting at 5 p.m., Oct. 5, in the lower level of the Swan Lake Conservation Education Center, 22676 Swan Lake Trail Drive, to discuss proposed largemouth bass regulation changes at Swan Lake.

The Iowa DNR is proposing to remove the 16-inch minimum length limit for largemouth bass and replace it with the statewide minimum length limit of 15

inches. No changes to the bag limit are proposed.

Any person with special requirements such as those related to mobility or hearing impairments who wishes to participate in the public meeting should promptly contact the DNR or ADA Coordinator at 515-725-8200, Relay Iowa TTY Service 800-735-7942, or Webmaster@dnr.iowa.gov to advise of specific needs.

Media Contact: Ben Wallace, Fisheries Management Biologist, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 712-657-2638.

Fishing regulations to be relaxed at Casey Lake in Tama County

TAMA COUNTY - The Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) will relax the fishing regulations at Casey Lake in Hickory Hills Park starting October 4 to allow anglers to more freely harvest fish before the lake is renovated.

The goal of the lake restoration project is to improve water quality and increase long-term sustainability of quality recreational opportunities at Casey Lake. Planned improvements include rehabilitating and building sediment basins, dredging in-lake sediment deposits, stabilizing the bank, improving shore access, and installing fishing habitat.

Anglers with a valid sport fishing license may harvest all sizes and unlimited quantities of any species of gamefish at Casey Lake, as well as common carp, grass carp, and sucker species. Any number of fishing rods and jugs is allowed. Dip nets will also be allowed as a legal gear for taking all fish species. Bowfishing, spearing, and snagging can be used as a legal gear for carp, grass carp, and sucker species. Anglers must remain in sight of any fishing rods and jugs at all times, and follow all other fishing regulations and area rules.

Relaxed fishing regulations for Casey Lake will be in effect from October 4 to December 1, 2023.

Specific regulation changes include:

- Removal of bag and length limit restrictions on largemouth bass.
- Removal of bag limit on channel catfish.
- Removal of bag limit on crappie and bluegill.
- Removal of limit for number of jugs.
- Removal of fishing rod
- Allow the use of dip nets as a legal form of fishing.

The only legal methods of take for bass, bluegill, bullhead, catfish, crappie, and sunfish are by dip nets, fishing rod and jugs. The only legal methods of take for

carp, grass carp, and suckers are fishing rod, jugs, dip nets, bowfishing, spearing, and snagging. Dynamite, poison, electric shocking devices, or any stupefying substances are not allowed. It is illegal to sell fish or stock captured fish into public waters.

Media Contact: Dan Kirby, Fisheries Biologist, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 563-927-3276.

Iowa DNR to host open house on Red Haw State Park improvement plans

CHARITON -- The Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is hosting an open house to discuss renovation and improvement plans for Red Haw State Park, from 5:30 – 8 p.m. on Monday, Oct. 10, in the Chamber Office of Chariton City Hall. The public is invited to attend.

The DNR will share preliminary plans for a new campground design and shelter to replace the beach building, and will provide an update of impacts from the March 2022 tornado that damaged the park.

The address for the Chariton City Hall is 115, S. Main Street, Chariton, Iowa.

DNR Contact: Riley Henry, Red Haw State Park Manager, phone (641) 774-5632; email: Red_Haw@dnr.iowa.gov