



IOWA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Iowa DNR News

Conservation and Recreation

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Fall fishing for Iowa's prize trout

Fishing Iowa's trout streams is a unique way to enjoy the cool fall weather and marvel at the amazing colors of Iowa's prize trout. Male brown and brook trout display their brightest, most vibrant spawning colors this time of year.

Iowa boasts some of the most beautiful and plentiful trout streams in the Midwest. A true angler's paradise, Northeast Iowa is dotted with hundreds of miles of trout streams. From easily accessible streams in state or county parks, to those found in Iowa's most wild and remote natural spaces, there are plenty of places to catch rainbow, brown and brook trout.

"It's a busy place this time of year," said Mike Steuck, Iowa DNR fisheries supervisor for interior streams. "Anglers can test their skills with lots of wild fish in these streams."

Although a little late for peak fall colors, the bluffs, valleys and rock outcroppings offer spectacular views. View some of the best bluffs in Northeast Iowa, starting with the narrow valley of Little Paint, west of Harpers Ferry. Several overlooks give excellent views of the stream from above.

Look for trout behind larger boulders and under rock ledges. Let your lure or bait drift around the boulders and just in front of the ledges.

Catch stream-reared brown trout up to 18-inches and 10- to 12-inch stocked rainbow trout in the Maquoketa River. Miles of public access spots line the river in Clayton and Delaware counties. Find rainbow trout in pools and runs while brown trout will be near wood habitat.

The best chance to catch all three trout species in one trip is at Spring Branch Creek, southeast of Manchester. There is great public access to more than 1.5 miles of coldwater stream.

Learn to “read” a stream, to identify habitats that offer food and cover. Trout are not randomly scattered in a stream. They locate themselves along the edge of the current flow near protective cover. The stream current carries food to the trout while it waits.

Trout try to bulk up in the fall for winter and are always hungry. Brown and brook trout lay their eggs in nests called redds in October and November. The eggs stay in these areas of cleaned gravel on the stream bottom until they hatch in late winter or early spring. Be careful where you walk to avoid stepping in or directly above these nests.

“Brown trout are wary, be as quiet and hidden as you can,” said Steuck. “If you can see them, they have already seen you and probably will not bite.”

Fish overcast and gray days when using spin fishing gear. Trout are less wary of lures at this time. If fly fishing, target midday on sunny and bright days. In cooler fall temperatures, bright warm days can stimulate an insect hatch. Dry flies can still be productive, but the insect hatches become more sporadic and less intense than in the summer so nymphs may be a better option.

Northeast Iowa draws thousands of anglers from across Iowa to its coldwater streams and excellent trout fishing. Iowa’s trout season is open all year. Iowa’s trout streams are too. About 105 coldwater trout streams await anglers in 10 northeast Iowa counties.

Anglers need a valid fishing license and pay the trout fee to fish for or possess trout. The daily limit is five trout per licensed angler with a possession limit of 10.

Learn more about Iowa’s trout streams, including maps and amenities, and tips and tricks to catch trout on the Iowa DNR’s website at www.iowadnr.gov/trout.

Media Contact: Mike Steuck, Regional Fisheries Supervisor, Northeast Iowa, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 563-927-3276.

Iowa's furharvest season began Nov. 4

Iowa trappers can expect to find good numbers of furbearers statewide during the 2023-24 season, that began on Nov. 4.

“Our furbearer population is stable or trending up for most species, except for muskrats and gray fox,” said Vince Evelsizer, furbearer biologist with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR). “Our muskrat population is good here and there in the marshes with ideal habitat and have water, but overall the population has been in a gradual decline overall over the past thirty years.”

Evelsizer said conditions are dry across most of the state and streams, rivers, ponds and wetlands are low or completely dry which can change how and where trappers make their sets.

He said red fox numbers are slightly higher but varies by region. Beaver is stable to increasing in several regions, and river otters and bobcats are stable to increasing as well. Muskrats had for generations been the species that beginning trappers targeted as they gained experience, but with fewer muskrats in the marshes, novice trappers have shifted to raccoons.

“Raccoons are a really good entry level species for novice trappers, they are abundant statewide and it's a species that would benefit from a reduction in its overall numbers,” he said.

Of note, youth can accompany a licensed adult trapper or fur hunter in the field without being licensed as long as they don't participate, he said. “However, we encourage participation. If the youth would like to participate, they can simply purchase a youth furharvester license for \$7.50.”

A change from last year is that the regular fur harvest season was extended a full month beginning this year. Last year the regular fur season closed on Jan. 31.

Beginning this year, it now closes on Feb. 28, 2024.

The CITES tag must remain with the animal until it is processed or sold. The DNR will not be collecting bobcat and otter skulls and lower jaws this year for tooth aging purposes.

Overall, the wild fur market is weak again this year, which is similar to the last few years, but regardless of fur prices, EVELSIZER encouraged trappers to take a beginner along to share the experience. Beavers, badgers, striped skunk, and bobcats may trend upward in fur markets this year.

“It’s a great way to get outdoors, spend some time with a beginner, enjoy trapping and pass along our knowledge,” he said.

Nearly 15,300 Iowans purchased a furharvester license in 2022 and that number has been fairly stable over the past seven years.

The Iowa Trapper’s Association and the Iowa DNR is offering one more ‘learn to furharvest’ workshop for beginners this fall on Nov. 18, in St. Charles. Participants will learn basic strategies for trapping such as trapping ethics, best management practices, proper equipment, trap placement, trapping regulations and steps for preparing hides for trade. Sessions will cover history of trapping in North America, wildlife identification, regulations and several demonstration stations. To register, go to www.iowadnr.gov/learntohunt.

Media Contact: Vince EVELSIZER, Furbearer Biologist, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 641-357-3517.

Iowa DNR to host open house on Backbone State Park forest stewardship plans

MANCHESTER -- The Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is hosting an open house to discuss forest stewardship plans for Backbone State Park and

Forest, from 6 to 7 p.m., Nov. 15, at the Environmental Field Office, in Manchester. The public is invited to attend.

The DNR will share plans for future forestry management of the area, focusing on maintaining wildlife habitat, reducing invasive species and promoting long-term sustainability of the forest resources.

The address for the Environmental Field Office is 1101 Commercial Court, Suite 1, in Manchester. The meeting will be come-and-go open house format, with parks and forestry staff available for questions.

Media Contact: Jeff Hildebrand, email: Jeff.Hildebrand@dnr.iowa.gov; (563) 920-1109 or Nathan Detrich, email: Nathan.Detrich@dnr.iowa.gov; (515) 608-5185.