



IOWA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Iowa DNR News

Conservation and Recreation

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Join a First Day Hike on New Year's Day

DES MOINES – What's the best way to spend New Year's Day? Take a First Day Hike in an Iowa state park or forest! Hikers can expect to be surrounded by the quiet beauty of nature in winter, and experience spectacular views, beautiful settings and the cultural treasures offered by Iowa's state parks.

"We are excited to host First Day Hikes again, helping visitors experience Iowa state parks and forests year-round," said Sherry Arntzen, chief of the Iowa Department of Natural Resources State Parks, Forests and Preserves Bureau. "These hikes are a great way to get outside, exercise, enjoy nature and welcome the New Year with friends and family."

Staff and volunteers will lead free, guided First Day Hikes in nearly 20 participating state parks. Some hikes will include wildlife viewing and hot beverages. Hikes will average one to two miles, or longer, depending on location. Details about the hikes can be found at www.iowadnr.gov/firstdayhikes. To see a comprehensive national map of First Day Hikes, visit www.stateparks.org. Participants are encouraged to share their adventures on social media with #FirstDayHikes or #iowastateparks.

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Hunters encouraged to discuss hunting plan, safety after weekend hunting incidents

The opening weekend of Iowa's second gun deer season saw another 50,000-plus hunters' enjoying time in the timber in pursuit of legendary whitetails. Unfortunately, there were three hunting incidents that serve as a reminder for hunters to review safety measures before heading out.

Two separate incidents involved the same issue - shooting at running deer - where deer were running between two hunters and one hunter was struck by a wayward shot from another in their party. The other incident involved a self-inflicted injury due to carelessly handling a firearm and lack of muzzle control.

All three required medical attention and all three were preventable, said Jamie Cook, hunter education coordinator for the Iowa Department of Natural Resources.

"We continue to stress that hunters should avoid shooting at running deer and to be sure of what is in front of and behind the deer before pulling the trigger," Cook said. "If there is any question about taking a shot, don't pull the trigger because once you pull the trigger, you can't call the shot back and no deer is worth taking an unsafe shot. Another will come along."

As a reminder, Cook said it is important to develop, review and follow a hunting plan that outlines how the hunt will unfold and the role and location for every member of the group while in the field.

"The hunting plan should also include reminders on not shooting at running deer, and safety basics of treating every gun as if it were loaded and always pointing the gun in a safe direction," Cook said.

With almost 77,000 deer reported to date through the harvest reporting system, nearly all of the 2023 deer hunts have occurred without incident.

"We hunt with those who we are closest to – our friends and our family. This is just a reminder that things can happen in a split second," Cook said. "At the end of the day, we all want to get home safely."

There have been 12 hunting incidents and two fatalities across all hunting seasons this fall.

Media Contact: Jamie Cook, Hunter Education Coordinator, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 515-350-8091.

Stay safe as Iowa lakes freeze over

The recent blast of arctic air is growing ice on lakes and ponds across the northern two-thirds of Iowa. Anglers are ready to get out for the popular early ice fishing season.

“Many of us can’t wait to get out on the ice each winter,” said Joe Larscheid, chief of fisheries for the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR). “Ice fishing is a fun, inexpensive activity for anglers of all ages to get outdoors and avoid cabin fever.”

The DNR recommends a minimum of four inches of clear ice for fishing and at least five inches for snowmobiles and ATVs.

“Check ice thickness as you make your way to your favorite fishing spot,” Larscheid said. “Ice conditions change constantly and its thickness can vary across the lake. Trust your instincts – if the ice does not look right, don’t go out.”

A blanket of snow on top of an ice-covered lake insulates the ice, slowing the growth of ice and hiding potential hazards or weak spots. River ice is 15 percent weaker than lake ice. Ice with a bluish color is safer than clear ice. Avoid slushy or honey-combed and stay away from dark spots on the ice. Don’t walk into areas where the snow cover looks discolored.

Safety Tips on the Ice

- No ice is 100 percent safe.
- New ice is usually stronger than old ice.
- Don’t go out alone - if the worst should happen, someone will be there to call for help or to help rescue.
- Let someone know where you are going and when you will return.
- Check ice thickness as you go out - there could be pockets of thin ice or places where ice recently formed.
- Avoid off-colored snow or ice. It is usually a sign of weakness.
- The insulating effect of snow slows down the freezing process.
- Bring along these basic items to help keep you safe: hand warmers, ice cleats to help prevent falls, ice picks (wear around your neck) to help you crawl out of the water if you fall in, a life jacket, a floating safety rope, a whistle to call for help, a basic first aid kit and extra dry clothes including a pair of gloves.

Media Contact: Joe Larscheid, Chief of Fisheries, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 515-201-3376.

Donations allow DNR to complete wildlife tracking system to monitor migration



Motus tower station at the Iowa DNR's Black Hawk Unit office, near Early. Photo courtesy of the Iowa DNR.

The Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has received two \$60,000 donations that will allow it to complete its Motus Wildlife Tracking System Network across the state within the next five years.

The Motus Wildlife Tracking System is a network of coordinated automated radio telemetry stations used to track long-distance movements of small animals. It began in 2013 by Birds Canada, near Toronto.

Automated antenna arrays connected to radio receivers are being installed throughout the Western hemisphere and birds, bats and insects are netted and trapped then outfitted with small tags that emit a radio signal every few seconds. When the tagged animal passes near a receiver station, it records the tag and identifies the animal to which it was attached. So multiple detections over time can build a map of migration for a tagged individual. In Iowa, the system will be tracking tagged birds, bats and insects during migration.

Diane Crookham-Johnson and Musco Sports Lighting, both of Oskaloosa, provided the donations that will be used to match federal grants and to purchase supplies for the Motus System in Iowa. The donations were accepted during the August meeting of the Natural Resource Commission.

Crookham-Johnson's love of birds began six years ago when she was looking to fill her time after the kids went off to college. Her husband suggested she should go to Lake Red Rock and photograph the eagles. Initially, she was reluctant.

"But I went and within minutes I was hooked," she said. Now, her morning routine includes a stop at nearby Maskunkya Marsh, where she has seen 208 species over the past six years.

Crookham-Johnson also volunteers at a local elementary and during certain times while the kids are standing in line, she would show videos of birds taken on her phone, hoping to peak their interest. She sees the data collection system as a way to bring the outdoors into the classroom – nature, conservation, connectedness between countries.

"Birds are everywhere, they're easy to see and relatable – I'm hoping to get them interested," she said. "Whatever we can do to get kids excited about nature, is good for earth and good for mental health."

Iowa is an important flyway for migrating birds and these generous donations will allow the state to fill in its east-west radio receiver station fence, which will detect more birds and provide more information on migration patterns that can inform conservation decisions, said Anna Buckardt Thomas, avian ecologist with the Iowa DNR.

"We're trying to increase the number of stations in Iowa and the Midwest to benefit current and future research," Buckardt Thomas said.

Iowa began installing stations in August 2021 as part of a Fish and Wildlife Service Grant that funded equipment for 40 stations in the Midwest and a dozen in Central and South America. To date, there are 18 stations operating in Iowa; nine by the Iowa DNR and nine by its partners. The data collected is available to view online at motus.org.

“The donations will allow us to add 20 additional stations that will complete the vision of an east-west fence in the middle of the state, and stations along our border rivers,” Buckardt Thomas said.

Stations cost about \$4,000 each, are designed to fit the site and expected to last for 10 years. The requirements to host a site is, its location in relation to other stations, elevation in the surrounding area, and an internet connection.

The stations are automated and have four antennas set to receive two radio frequencies. The larger antennas have a detection range of 15 kilometers, the smaller antennas can cover 10 kilometers. Once installed, the system is fairly low maintenance and always on, ready to detect tags nearby.

Media Contact: Anna Buckardt Thomas, Avian Ecologist, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 515-823-3945.

Ledges State Park 100th anniversary kickoff event Dec. 21

BOONE, Iowa – 2024 will mark the 100th anniversary of the dedication of Ledges State Park. Iowa DNR staff and members of Friends of the Ledges will host a 100th anniversary kick-off event on Dec. 21, at the Boone City Hall Auditorium, 923 8th Street, in Boone. Doors open at 6 p.m., with a short presentation at 6:30. The event is free to attend.

The event will be highlighted by a program on how Ledges became one of Iowa’s first state parks; as well as information and displays on events, projects, and changes coming to Ledges in 2024. Friends of the Ledges members will present details on how to get involved in the year-long celebration, as well as the creation of an endowment fund to help preserve the resources of the park into the next century.

“Everybody loves the Ledges, and there’s a great story on how it came to be one of Iowa’s first state parks. It’s a story that continues to this day through the efforts of our volunteers and staff,” said Andy Bartlett, Ledges State Park manager.

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