



IOWA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Iowa DNR News

Conservation and Recreation

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Find fleeting beauties of spring with the DNR weekly bloom report

Wildflowers are enticing treasures for wilderness lovers each year. One of the most encouraging signs of spring, the first wildflowers seem to bloom overnight.

Discover the renewal of spring in the colors of the flowers with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources' (DNR) weekly woodland wildflower bloom report.

Early spring wildflowers are commonly called ephemerals, which means "short-lived." Their dazzling show of spring color is only a limited engagement, so take time to see the flowers before they are gone.

Visit the Woodland Wildflower Report

webpage (<https://iowadnr.gov/wildflowers>) for an up-to-date list of wildflowers in bloom each week until mid-May. You can sign up to receive weekly wildflower bloom reports in your inbox.

Media Contact: Joe Herring, District Forester, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 641-485-5040.

Iowa's Prairie Chicken Festival is April 6

Kellerton, Iowa – The unique courtship of Iowa’s prairie chickens will be on full display at the Kellerton Grasslands Bird Conservation Area on April 6, during the annual Prairie Chicken Festival, in Ringgold County. The festival will be held at the Kellerton viewing platform, two miles west and one mile south of Kellerton. There is ample parking and the viewing platform is accessible for those with limited mobility.

Viewing will begin before dawn and last until the birds diminish their courtship dancing and booming, around 8 a.m.

Iowa began reintroducing prairie chickens in the 1980s, then released additional wild birds captured in western Nebraska from 2012-17, to supplement the population and add genetic diversity. To date, the population is holding steady, but at fairly low numbers, said Stephanie Shepherd, wildlife biologist with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Wildlife Diversity Program.

“Although stable, our population is around 65-70 birds at the Grand River Grasslands, which is low, and we’re not sure what their future is, so if you want to see them, now is the time,” she said.

During the festival the DNR will be onsite to help put spotting scopes on birds and to answer questions.

“The birds will be a good distance from the viewing platform so we are encouraging attendees to bring either a spotting scope or pair of binoculars,” she said. A limited number of scopes will be on hand for those who need them.

Can’t make it on April 6? The chickens will be displaying likely through the end of the month. Dusk is also a good time to view the birds because the sun is in the west, though the birds may be a little less active.

Kellerton is one of the premier grasslands in the state, for more than prairie chickens, but for other grassland birds as well. “It’s a really neat area for people to get a feel for what an expansive grassland looks like,” she said.

Media Contact: Stephanie Shepherd, Wildlife Biologist, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 515-230-6599.

Iowa’s spring turkey season is right around the corner

Coming off record harvests in 2020 and again in 2023, Iowa’s spring turkey hunters could be living in the “good ol’ days.” And with three straight years of good hatches across much of the state, roughly 35,000 hunters are ready to hit the woods.

“Two-year-old birds drive the population, do lots of the gobbling and tend to move more than the older toms, which is what hunters like,” said Jim Coffey, forest wildlife biologist with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources. “Hunters like to hear a lot of birds and not see other hunters.”

Iowa’s spring turkey hunt is spread among four seasons, allowing hunters to have a unique experience. Season one is April 8-11; season two is April 12-16; season three is April 17-23; and season four is April 24 – May 12. Hunters may purchase up to two tags with at least one being in season four.

“It looks we will have an early leaf-out this spring, which will get the birds disbursed to their breeding areas soon, so it will be a good opportunity to do some scouting,” he said.

Last spring, hunters reported a record harvest of nearly 14,850 turkeys, with birds harvested in all 99 counties.

“We have seen good production in the north central part of the state, which isn’t an area that most people think of when it comes to turkey hunting,” Coffey said. “The Loess Hills, northeast and southeast Iowa are more traditional turkey spots and also have good populations. We have documented good production in southeast Iowa, which is nice to see as the population in that area had been down in recent years.”

Iowa has become a bucket list turkey hunting state for many nonresidents who apply for an opportunity at a large Midwestern bird. Applications are taken in January for a limited number of tags based on four seasons and five zones.

“We want to provide non-resident hunters an opportunity to explore our state and see what Iowa has to offer, knowing there are many Iowans that enjoying traveling to new states to hunt as well,” he said.

Nonresident hunting is limited to 2,148 tags annually.

Youth-only season is April 5-7

Youth turkey season is designed to provide a strong mentoring experience for the youth hunter. It is restricted to Iowa residents only.

“Turkey hunting is an intimate sport and mentoring is a way to learn from other’s mistakes,” Coffey said. “With only about one-in-five hunters tagging a turkey, failure is part of the process. A successful hunt should be gauged on the adventure and experience of being in the woods not placing a tag on a bird.”

Youth tags are sold through the end of youth season on April 7. Youth tags are valid for youth season and each of the four regular seasons until filled or when the season four closes on May 12.

Licenses are not sold after the youth season closes. Youth tags have been steadily increasing, with nearly 6,200 sold last year.

Report your harvest

Successful hunters are required to report their harvest by midnight of the day after it is recovered through the Go Outdoors Iowa app, by going online at www.iowadnr.gov, calling the toll free phone number printed on the tag, at any license vendor during regular business hours, by texting your registration number to 1-800-771-4692.

Media Contact: Jim Coffey, Forest Wildlife Biologist, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 515-979-8033.

Review safe hunting practices ahead of spring turkey season

Roughly 35,000 camo-covered hunters in stealth mode will be heading to the timber in the next few weeks for Iowa's spring turkey season. And, just as important as contacting the landowner, checking the shell supply and finding the decoys, part of every hunt prep is to review safe hunting practices.

"When I think about spring turkey hunting safety, I come back to the basic safety tips – avoid wearing patriotic colors – red, white, blue – those are the same colors found in a gobblers head - and don't shoot at movement – wait to take the shot until you've identified the beard on the turkey," said Jamie Cook, hunter education coordinator for the Iowa Department of Natural Resources. "We also tell hunters to be sure of what's in front of and behind the bird before taking the shot in case you miss because once you pull that trigger, you can't call the shot back."

Cook said the mild winter will likely lead to an early leaf out and green up and as the forest changes to spring, hunters will need to dial in their zone and range of fire.

"Pattern your gun so you know its effective distance," he said. "Know the lay of the land and as the timber greens up, you need to reduce your zone of fire."

If mentoring a new hunter, he said, be sure to model ethical hunter behavior.

"How you hunt will leave an impression and influence how they hunt in the future," he said. "Teach them the right way to hunt and you will be giving them the tools to be successful."

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

Fort Atkinson Preserve closed for renovations

FORT ATKINSON -- Fort Atkinson State Preserve in Winneshiek County is currently closed to visitors as crews begin work to repair and stabilize the 1840s-era fort structures. The closure will continue until the project is complete later this summer.

“We are excited to start the important work of restoring features of this historic site,” said Detra Dettman, northeast Iowa district supervisor for DNR Parks, Forests and Preserves Bureau.

Fort Atkinson is a nationally significant military post from the 1840s managed by the Iowa DNR as a state preserve. The construction project is funded in part through a grant from the Save America's Treasures program from the National Park Service's Historic Preservation Fund, Department of the Interior; and donations from the Friends of Fort Atkinson.

“The work should be completed well ahead of the Friends of Fort Atkinson Annual Rendezvous event to be held September 28-29,” says DNR District Supervisor Detra Dettmann.

For more information contact Volga River State Recreation Area at 563-425-4161.

Urban Forestry awards recognize local dedication to trees and outreach

DES MOINES – Every year the Urban Forestry Awards luncheon recognizes cities, college campuses and utilities that demonstrate a variety of dedication to the importance of trees in their respective communities.

Awards will be presented April 4th at the FFA Enrichment Center in Ankeny, on behalf of the Arbor Day Foundation and the Iowa Department of Natural Resources. A full list of award winners follows.

Tree City USA Award – To qualify for the Tree City USA award, a city must have either a city forester or an active city tree board, have a tree ordinance, spend at least \$2 per capita annually for its community forestry program, and have a tree planting and maintenance plan.

The award recipients are Adel, Ames, Arnolds Park, Atlantic, Belle Plaine, Bettendorf, Bondurant, Boone, Burlington, Carlisle, Carroll, Cedar Falls, Cedar Rapids, Clarinda, Clarksville, Clinton, Clive, Coralville, Council Bluffs, Cresco, Davenport, Decorah, Denver, Des Moines, DeWitt, Dubuque, Dysart, Fort Dodge, Gladbrook, Glenwood, Greene, Grimes, Grundy Center, Hampton, Hiawatha, Hillsboro, Hopkinton, Hudson, Indianola, Iowa City, Jefferson, Johnston, Livermore, Luxemburg, Manchester, Maquoketa, Marion, Marquette, Marshalltown, Mason City, Maxwell, Muscatine, Nevada, Newton, North Liberty, Odebolt, Oelwein, Oskaloosa, Ottumwa, Pleasant Hill, Polk City, Red Oak, Sioux City, Spencer, Story City, Tipton, Urbandale, Van Horne, Washington, Waterloo, Waverly, Webster City, West Des Moines, and Winterset.

Tree City USA Growth Award – To qualify for the Tree City USA Growth award, cities must provide education and public relations, partnerships, planning and management, and tree planting and maintenance in their community.

The award recipients, which were also recipients of the Tree City USA award, are Ames, Bettendorf, Bondurant, Burlington, Coralville, Decorah, Denver, Des Moines, Dysart, Grundy Center, Hiawatha, Iowa City, Johnston, Marion, Marquette, Mason City, Oelwein, Polk City, Story City, Waverly and Winterset.

Tree City of the World - Recognition through the Tree Cities of the World program represents the first step toward achieving a green vision for your city. To receive recognition, a town or city must meet five core standards: responsibility for the care of trees, official policy that governs the management of forests and trees, updated inventory or assessment, a dedicated annual budget for the routine implementation of the tree management plan and an annual celebration of trees.

Burlington, Decorah and Des Moines are this year's award recipients.

Tree Campus USA Award – To qualify for the Tree Campus USA award, a campus must have a campus Tree Advisory Committee, a tree care plan, a tree program with dedicated annual expenditures, an annual Arbor Day observance and a service learning project to engage the student body.

The award recipients are Divine Word College, Drake University, Hawkeye Community College, Iowa State University, Kirkwood Community College, University of Iowa and William Penn University.

Tree Line USA Award – To qualify for the Tree Line USA award, a utility must meet five minimum requirements, including quality tree care, annual worker training, tree planting and public education, a tree-based energy conservation program and an annual Arbor Day celebration.

The award recipients are Alliant Energy, MidAmerican Energy and Waverly Utilities.

Media contact: Emma Hanigan, Urban Forestry Coordinator, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 515-249-1732.

DNR investigates tree and fire vandalism at Big Creek State Park

POLK CITY, IA – On March 15 around 10:30 p.m. several local law enforcement agencies were called to Big Creek State Park to extinguish an illegal bonfire at the east boat ramp, which was allegedly set by a party of youths. When officials arrived on scene, the youths dispersed. No arrests have been made.

DNR park staff also discovered two young trees were chopped down for firewood and burned. One tree was a memorial planted by long-time park volunteer Richard Haire in honor of his son, Sean, who died in 2017.

“State parks are special places in the hearts of many families,” said Chad Kelchen, south-central supervisor in the State Parks, Forests and Preserves Bureau. “When people choose to destroy a piece of the park, they don’t understand the deep emotional ties to these areas, even as simple as a single tree.”

Kelchen reminds state park visitors that fires can only be lit in designated fire rings or grills, and that it is illegal to chop living trees for firewood. “We need people to follow these rules so parks stay safe and the natural environment cared for, so everyone can enjoy them.”

The agencies called to the scene of the fire included the Polk City Police Department, Polk City Fire Department and the Polk County Sheriff’s Department. The incident remains under investigation.

Those with information pertaining to the vandalism are asked to contact park staff at Big_Creek@dnr.iowa.gov, 515-984-6473. Reports can be made anonymously.