

# Iowa DNR News

CONSERVATION AND RECREATION

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## Sand Creek Wildlife Area is a birder, hunters paradise



*The Sand Creek Wildlife Area, in Decatur and Ringgold counties, is popular spot for deer and turkey hunters in the fall and spring, and for birders all year long. Photo courtesy of the Iowa DNR.*

Tucked in to the rolling hills of southern Iowa's Decatur County is Sand Creek Wildlife Area, a 3,700-acre destination for deer hunters and bird watchers. Here, cell service disappears and nature's sounds take over – this isn't a white noise machine – it's the real thing.

"It's one of our most popular areas because of its size and location," said Chad Paup, wildlife biologist with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources. "This area has everything Iowa has to offer. It draws a lot of people from the Des Moines area and from outside of Iowa."

Sand Creek is a mix of reconstructed prairie and open spaces, with timber and river bottom floodplains interspersed. The area management plan has prioritized improving the timber component since 2015, and Paup said the nearby Grand River Wildlife Unit has been working toward that goal by removing cedars and invasive species to benefit turkeys, quail and woodland bird species.

“That work is paying dividends,” he said. “You can see some improvements on the area and in the stands. It’s pretty cool.”

Staff also maintain an extensive network of firebreaks, he said, that allows them to use prescribed fire as a management tool on between 200 and 500 acres each year. The firebreaks could also be used to hike through Sand Creek and by hunters looking for an assist with dragging out a deer.

Staff partner with some of their neighboring farmers on mowing, cropping and habitat work and for that effort, they are allowed to harvest up to 90 percent of the crops – the remaining 10 percent will stay as a food plot.

Because of Sand Creek’s size and habitat diversity, wildlife researchers have spent time here, documenting the different species of animals that call the area home.

The Multiple Species Inventory and Monitoring team has documented an extensive bird population, including common nighthawk, hairy woodpecker, great crested fly catcher, white-crowned sparrow, yellow-breasted chat, northern flicker and more. The crew documented 11 bat species and more than 60 species of butterflies, including regal fritillaries.

### **Bird Conservation Area**

Sand Creek Woodland/Savanna was named as Iowa’s 15<sup>th</sup> Bird Conservation Area (BCA) in early 2010. The designation encompasses more than 30,000 acres of woodland and grassland habitat on public and private land in Decatur, Ringgold and Union counties. The Sand Creek Woodland/Savanna Bird Conservation Area contains both woodland and grassland habitats providing homes to about half of Iowa’s nesting bird species.

The Bird Conservation Area concept focuses on all-bird conservation on a large scale its success depends upon partnerships between public agencies, private conservation organizations, and private landowners. Each BCA consists of at least 10,000 acres with one or more core areas of permanently protected bird habitat surrounded by large areas of privately-owned land that also provides important habitat for birds. Core public lands are managed for all wild birds, but especially for those species experiencing regional or continental population declines.

**Media Contact:** Chad Paup, Wildlife Biologist, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 515-238-5708.

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**Mothers Against Drunk Driving and Iowa Cubs team up for First Responders Night**



*State Conservation Officers Nate Johnson and Adam Arnold recognized during the Iowa Cubs game on June 27 by MADD Iowa. Photo courtesy of Shannon Booth, with MADD Iowa.*

Des Moines — Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) Iowa staff teamed up with the Iowa Cubs on June 27, to recognize MADD Hero Award Winners who went above and beyond to save lives through enforcement and education of impaired driving laws in 2023.

MADD Iowa honored 37 officers from across the state who were nominated by others in their department for their efforts in saving lives through traffic enforcement and public education. Conservation officers Adam Arnold and Nate Johnson, with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR), were recognized for their efforts enhancing the DNR's impaired driving enforcement education related to ATV's, snowmobiles and boating enforcement.

"Both Adam and Nate are top performers in our boating while intoxicated enforcement efforts year after year, and both teach boating while intoxicated courses across the state to our agency and to others," said Captain Matt Bruner, with the Iowa DNR's Law Enforcement Bureau.

Also recognized were officers with the Iowa State Patrol, County Sheriff Offices, and local Police Departments. Officers awarded have many achievements individually, some of which include ARIDE Certification, DRE Certification, SFST Instructor Certification, and being local advocates to educate youth about impaired driving.

Before the game's first pitch, MADD Hero honorees were brought onto the tops of the dugouts while the Iowa Cubs announcer introduced them to the crowd.

## Grant funds available for communities impacted by the 2020 derecho

The Iowa Legislature appropriated state infrastructure funds to the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to be used for a community-based tree planting program for derecho recovery tree planting.

The Community Forestry Grant Program provides reimbursable grants to purchase and plant trees suitable to Iowa in counties included in the 2020 Governor's disaster proclamation. Approximately a total of \$146,500.00 in funds are available to state and local governments, schools and volunteer organizations, and service organizations in the 27 impacted counties.

Award recipients will be reimbursed \$500 to \$10,000 and are not required to provide a match for purchase of trees and planting materials. Qualifying public planting lands include, but are not limited to, street rights-of-way, parks, school grounds, courthouse lawns, public buildings, fairgrounds, cemeteries, libraries, and trails (DNR lands are not eligible).

The fall application and rules are available online at [www.iowadnr.gov/urbanforestry](http://www.iowadnr.gov/urbanforestry). Applications are due by 4:30 p.m. on Monday, August 26, 2024.

**Media Contact:** Ellie Jones, Community Disaster Recovery Coordinator, Iowa Department of Natural Resources and Trees Forever, 319-826-0814.

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## Trees for Kids grant applications due August 26

DES MOINES – The popular Trees for Kids grant program is accepting applications through August 26.

Grantees can be awarded up to \$2,500 to purchase trees and mulch. All trees for this program must be planted on public community grounds (park, community center, public school, etc.) Youth are required to be engaged in the process, most often helping to plant the trees on site.

“Planting trees is a fun way to connect kids to nature, build on their sense of wonder and explore the benefits trees provide at their school and in their community,” said Chip Murrow, urban forestry program specialist for the Iowa Department of Natural Resources.

Studies show trees planted around schools and in neighborhoods give youth increased levels of concentration, lower levels of aggression, lower levels of obesity and fewer symptoms of ADHD.

To apply for the grant, visit: [www.iowadnr.gov/UrbanForestry](http://www.iowadnr.gov/UrbanForestry).

**Media Contact:** Chip Murrow, Urban Forestry Program Specialist, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 515-822-1031.