

Iowa DNR News

CONSERVATION AND RECREATION

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Habitat diversity draws bird watchers, hunters to Copeland Bend



Gravel topped levee offers hikers and wildlife watchers a good view of the floodwaters at Copeland Bend. Photo courtesy of the Iowa DNR.

Forty miles south of Council Bluffs on the Missouri River is the 3,500-plus-acre Copeland Bend Wildlife Area, an expansive mix of grasslands and high-quality wetlands constructed after the extensive flooding in 2011, when the big river was closed to boating, and levees up and down the Big Muddy were breached.

After the waters receded, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers began to relocate and rebuild the levee system away from the river, creating a series of shallow wetlands and borrow pits as materials were needed to construct the new levee.

On this cloud-free June morning, pheasants can be seen scurrying on the gravel topped levees and heard crowing in the grassland. Great blue herons are fishing in the shallow floodwaters. Ring billed gulls are swooping above the water surface. Mourning doves are seemingly everywhere.

A state endangered short-eared owl was seen nesting here in 2005, and state endangered least terns have been here. Crayfish snakes, a species of greatest conservation need, have also been documented on Copeland Bend.

“The levee setback was a major win-win here with lots of wetland development,” said Matt Dollison, wildlife biologist for the Iowa Department of Natural Resources Nishnabotna Wildlife Unit.

The Missouri River is a major migration corridor popular with bird watchers and duck and goose hunters. The shallow wetlands offer ducks and geese a stopping point on the migration and hunters a walk-in hunting spot.

“The nice thing about this area is you can see water birds and shorebirds on the wetlands, and there is about a 2,000-acre block of grassland here supporting grassland species,” Dollison said. There is a timber component, he said, that supports mushroom and deer hunting.

The five-mile-long levee is topped with gravel and is a good place to walk or bike, and to see wildlife. Three deeper borrow pits have fish in them and are available to kayak. “Bow fishing carp is prime time here, when there is shallow flood water,” he said.

Another improvement came after the 2019 flood, when the Iowa Department of Transportation installed a larger flow-through under U.S. Hwy. 2 to allow more water under the road. So far, the road has not been closed due to flooding.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers acquired about 3,000 acres, the State of Iowa has roughly 500 acres along the river. The crescent shaped, State of Iowa land, is right on the river and could be a good place for paddlers to pull off for primitive camping or bow hunters to boat in for a different type of hunt. Checking the hunting atlas can help with navigating the area.

“Much of this flood prone land was enrolled in permanent USDA wetland easements, prior to being purchased by the Corps and State of Iowa, so there are limits to what management we can do,” he said.

Prescribed fire is a major management tool used to manage habitat and keep trees in check. “A local farmer partners with the DNR to do a lot of the habitat work, through an agricultural lease, that we call a habitat lease,” said Dollison.

Media Contact: Matt Dollison, Wildlife Biologist, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 712-350-0147.

Fishing regulations to be relaxed at McKinley Lake in Creston

CRESTON - The Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is relaxing the fishing regulations at McKinley Lake in Creston. The city of Creston will begin to drain the lake in August as part of a lake restoration project.

McKinley Lake, constructed in the 1870s, has accumulated a lot of sediment and nutrients over time causing poor water quality that impacts outdoor recreation opportunities on the community lake.

The City of Creston's Park and Recreation Board has made improvements to the lake's watershed to reduce the amount of sediment and nutrients washing into the lake. In-lake work is the final step in the lake restoration process. Planned improvements include targeted dredging, improving shoreline access and adding fish habitat, a fishing pier and small boat/canoe/kayak access.

Anglers with a **valid fishing license** may harvest any size or number of largemouth bass, bluegill, channel catfish, and all other fish species from McKinley Lake. Any number of fishing poles or jug fishing is allowed. Anglers must remain in sight of these lines at all times, and follow all other fishing regulations and area rules. Trot lines will be allowed (name and address must be attached), however lines may not be set across the entire water body. It is illegal to sell fish or stock captured fish into public waters. All navigation rules still apply.

Liberalized fishing regulations for McKinley Lake will be in effect immediately. 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 the two line/two hook fishing restriction; anglers must be within visual sight of the lines.

For more information contact Andy Jansen, Iowa DNR Fisheries Biologist at 641-464-3108 or Corey Carlton, Iowa DNR Conservation Officer at 641-414-2173.

2024 volunteer fire department – wildland fire assistance grants available

The Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Forestry - Fire Program, working in coordination with the US Forest Service, has grant money available for Iowa's rural fire departments to help battle wildfires.

Applications are due on Oct. 15. The grant provides 50 percent reimbursement for wildland fire equipment with a maximum reimbursement grant of \$4,500 per department.

The grants offer funding assistance for wildfire suppression equipment, slide-in units, hoses, nozzles, adapters, portable tanks and pumps, personal protective equipment and communications equipment. Additionally, if a fire department has a

special need that can be tied directly to wildfire suppression, this grant allows for such special requests.

Ryan Harr, state wildland fire supervisor for the Iowa DNR, said fire departments should submit a Wildland Fire Report whenever they respond to a wildland fire or provide assistance to a prescribed or controlled wildland fire. Departments actively returning these reports receive priority points in the Volunteer Fire Assistance grant application scoring process.

All Iowa volunteer fire departments were mailed information about the 2024 Volunteer Fire Assistance Grant. The grant application package and the Wildland Fire Report form are available online at www.iowadnr.gov/fire.

For more information, contact Ryan Harr, Iowa DNR Fire Program leader, 515-233-8067 or Ryan.Harr@dnr.iowa.gov; or Naomi Splinter, forestry administrative assistant, at 515-233-1161 or Naomi.Splinter@dnr.iowa.gov.

Learn to Hunt program opens registration for waterfowl course

DES MOINES - The Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is offering a program to teach skills needed to hunt, field dress and cook waterfowl to women who have little to no waterfowl hunting experience.

“Waterfowl hunting can be challenging and this course will teach basic strategies, proper equipment, where to hunt, safe shooting practices, and how to field dress, prepare and cook them,” said Jamie Cook, program coordinator with the Iowa DNR.

The Aug. 24 course costs \$35 and will be held at the Olofson Shooting Range, near Polk City, from 2 to 7 p.m. Space is limited so early registration is encouraged. For more information and to begin the registration process, go to <http://license.gooutdoorsiowa.com/Event/ViewEvent.aspx?id=3117>

The program is provided through a partnership with the Iowa DNR, Iowa Hunter Ed Instructor Association and Delta Waterfowl. It's part of a national effort to recruit, retain and reactivate hunters due to the overall decline in hunting and outdoor recreation.

Media Contact: Jamie Cook, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 515.350.8091

DNR seeks comment on proposed nonpermanent structures and boating administrative rule revisions

The Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is seeking informal comments on administrative rules for nonpermanent structures, permanently moored vessels, boating registration, boating equipment, and zoning.

Executive Order 10 (EO10), signed by the Governor on January 10, 2023, requires all state agencies to identify which administrative rule chapters will be retained or rescinded. The EO10 process includes public engagement with the opportunity for meaningful input.

The Iowa DNR has reviewed the following rule chapters relating to programs administered by the Law Enforcement Bureau: 571 Iowa Administrative Code (IAC) Chapters 36 (Green Valley Lake Special Water Activity Rules), 37 (Boating Safety Equipment), 38 (Boat Registration and Numbering), 39 (Boating Passenger Capacity), 40 (Boating Speed and Distance Zoning), 41 (Boating Navigation Aids), 42 (Boating Accident Reports), 43 (Motorboat Noise), 45 (Boat Motor Regulations), 48 (Inspection of Permanently Moored Vessels) and Chapter 55 (Nonpermanent Structures). Chapters 36-43, including chapter 45, have been arranged into Divisions and combined into one chapter. Chapters 48 and 55 are remaining independent chapters.

These chapters have been revised to eliminate redundancies, improve efficiency, and implement updates in accordance with federal law changes and US Coast Guard guidance. Coal Creek Marsh, in Warren County, has been added to the list of artificial marshes in new Chapter 37 with relevant boating restrictions. New Chapter 37 also includes updates to comply with House File 2485, signed into law during the 2024 legislative session.

The public are invited to provide informal comments on the proposed rule changes. DNR will accept written comments through July 29, 2024. Written comments or questions regarding the proposed rules should be submitted to: Matt.bruner@dnr.iowa.gov for 571 IAC Chapter 55 and Susan.Stocker@dnr.iowa.gov for 571 IAC Chapters 37 and 48. Comments should be made to specific portions of the rules.

After receiving and reviewing informal comments, the DNR will create a draft Regulatory Analysis and draft Notice of Intended Action. The DNR will host a formal public comment period for these drafts, followed by a public hearing, in September 2024.

Versions of the rules, including a “clean” copy and a version showing revisions, can be found on the DNR webpage: <https://www.iowadnr.gov/About-DNR/About-DNR/Administrative-Rules>.

DNR seeks comment on proposed special events and fireworks displays administrative rule revisions

The Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is seeking informal comments on administrative rules for special events and fireworks displays.

Executive Order 10 (EO10), signed by the Governor on January 10, 2023, requires all state agencies to identify which administrative rule chapters will be retained or rescinded. The EO10 process includes public engagement with the opportunity for meaningful input.

The Iowa DNR has reviewed the following rule chapter relating to programs administered by the Department of Natural Resources: 571 Iowa Administrative Code (IAC) Chapters 44 (Special Events and Fireworks Displays). This chapter has been revised to eliminate redundancies, improve efficiency, and implement updates.

The public are invited to provide informal comments on the proposed rule changes. DNR will accept written comments through July 29, 2024. Written comments or questions regarding the proposed rules should be submitted to Susan.Stocker@dnr.iowa.gov. Comments should be made to specific portions of the rules.

After receiving and reviewing informal comments, the DNR will create a draft Regulatory Analysis and draft Notice of Intended Action. The DNR will host a formal public comment period for this draft, followed by a public hearing, in September 2024.

Versions of the rule, including a “clean” copy and a version showing revisions, can be found on the DNR webpage: <https://www.iowadnr.gov/About-DNR/About-DNR/Administrative-Rules>.