

Iowa DNR News

CONSERVATION AND RECREATION

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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- [Iowa's 2024 pheasant nesting outlook](#)
- [Iowa DNR dispatching wildland firefighters across the western United States](#)
- [Iowa angler wins grand prize in Midwest Walleye Challenge](#)
- [DNR seeks comment on proposed Shooting Sports Grant Program administrative rule revisions](#)

Iowa's 2024 pheasant nesting outlook

Iowa's pheasant population typically shows increases following mild winters with springs that are dryer and warmer than normal. While last winter was average to below average snowfall, spring was wetter than normal, with May coming in as the eighth wettest in 152 years of records.

Given the statewide information, the weather model is predicting pheasant populations will likely be lower for the 2024 hunting season.

"I expect there to be regional differences in the population this fall," said Todd Bogenschutz, upland wildlife biologist with the Iowa DNR. "Our best counts will still likely be in the northern and central regions, but likely lower counts in the southeast and south-central regions. With the severe cold and snow in south central and southeast regions, quail numbers will likely be the same or lower than last year, but perhaps higher in the southwest region."

This prediction is based on weather data, Bogenschutz said, and it can be wrong. The DNR's August roadside survey is the best gauge of what upland populations will be this fall. The survey is conducted between Aug. 1 – 15, and the results will be posted on the DNR webpage www.iowadnr.gov/pheasantsurvey around Sept. 15.

Media Contact: Todd Bogenschutz, Upland Wildlife Research Biologist, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 515-979-0828.

Iowa DNR dispatching wildland firefighters across the western United States

AMES - The Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Fire Program has dispatched wildland firefighters to help with fire management efforts across the Rocky Mountains, the west coast and the Pacific Northwest.

Iowa DNR staff and other Iowa-based firefighters are members of hand crews in Colorado and South Dakota. Other agency staff are assisting the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service fire engines in Wyoming.

One Iowa DNR engine and crew is assigned to southern California. Support specialists and Emergency Medical Technicians from Iowa are supporting efforts in northern California and Oregon.

“Iowa has gotten a reprieve from several years of drought conditions with heavy rainfalls the past month, but the western United States has seen just the opposite,” said Ryan Harr, Iowa DNR Fire Program supervisor. “After a year or two of generally wet conditions, much of the region is drying out rapidly through the early summer.”

Wetter conditions the past couple seasons in western states led to lots of vegetation regrowth. As the regrowth dries out, it provides ample fuel for wildfires.

“The rest of the 2024 wildfire season looks to be busy with the current uptick in western wildfires,” explains Harr. He anticipates the DNR will continue to support federal partners by providing firefighters and support staff throughout the summer and early fall.

DNR staff and cooperating firefighters gain valuable experience in fire suppression, incident management, and other emergency support functions, and bring those lessons home to Iowa to assist in both prescribed fire and wildfire management throughout Iowa.

“Prescribed fire is an important tool for habitat management in Iowa, one the DNR and other agencies employ safely on many thousands of acres across the state each year,” Harr said. Agency staff have also been asked to assist local fire departments in recent years when wildfires threaten public lands.

Wildland firefighters complete rigorous training and must meet annual physical fitness standards to qualify for national fire assignments. A number of Iowa-certified wildland firefighters have additional training and certifications in areas such as chainsaw or engine operations. Each year, Iowa DNR certifies about 10 of its own staff and about 35 Iowans from partner agencies, volunteer fire departments, and other organizations to be available for national fire incident assignments.

For more information, contact Ryan Harr at 712-250-0818 or ryan.harr@dnr.iowa.gov.

Iowa angler wins grand prize in Midwest Walleye Challenge

BOONE - The Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) partnered for a third year with MyCatch by Angler's Atlas to conduct a statewide walleye fishing challenge March 30 through June 30.

Iowa angler Larry Hulsebus was one of the Midwest Walleye Challenge grand prize winners, earning a five-day Northwest Ontario walleye fishing trip.

This year's walleye challenge was expanded to other states across the Midwest and into Canada as part of a larger fisheries research project funded by the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies. Almost 900 anglers participated from across the Midwest.

"Iowa had the most participants, with nearly 200 anglers signed up, and 128 anglers completed 1119 fishing trips reporting 1,646 fish caught at 93 different water bodies throughout the state," explains Jeff Kopaska, DNR fisheries research biometrician. "Participation of Iowa anglers continues to grow each year."

Across the entire Midwest, 434 anglers completed 3066 fishing trips, reporting catches of 3,789 fish at 510 different water bodies. Anglers in Ontario reported catching 533 walleyes, Illinois anglers submitted 434 fish, and Nebraska anglers entered 386 fish.

Iowa anglers competed against other Iowa anglers for biweekly prizes. All catches from across the Midwest qualified for the grand prize drawings. The largest fish caught during the challenge was a 31.5-inch walleye caught by Dylan Ivall in Ontario.

The following Iowa anglers are prize winners.

- Cristian Lemus, for the longest fish, a 29.5- inch walleye
- Jerry Eiben, for the most water bodies fished, with 31 fish caught at 6 different water bodies
- Larry Hulsebus, a random draw cash prize for a submitted catch
- Josh Crouch, for the longest fish in South Dakota, a 28-inch fish

"We learned many great things by expanding the challenge to other Midwest states. It was interesting to see similar catch rates with 0.43 fish per hour in Iowa and 0.3 fish per hour across the Midwest," said Kopaska. "Iowa anglers shared that catches seemed slower this year with lower catch rate and overall number of fish caught compared to previous years."

Iowa challenge participants caught the most fish at Big Creek Lake (324 fish), Hickory Grove Lake (216 fish), Brushy Creek Lake (155 fish), the Des Moines River (148 fish), and Rathbun Reservoir (116 fish).

The Midwest Walleye Challenge is a citizen science data collection effort sponsored by the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and Angler's Atlas to help improve walleye fishing across Iowa. DNR fisheries biologists use the data entered to assess and manage walleye populations. The MyCatch mobile app maintains anonymous location data, so anglers' secret spots stay secret.

A new addition to the Midwest Walleye Challenge is a Fall Classic starting September 30 to October 31. Anglers can register for the fall classic at <https://www.anglersatlas.com/event/820/>. Participants can choose the free entry option to qualify for non-cash prizes or pay the \$25 fee to qualify for all prizes including cash payouts.

MEDIA CONTACT: Jeff Kopaska, Fisheries Research Biometrician, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 515-204-8021.

DNR seeks comment on proposed Shooting Sports Grant Program administrative rule revisions

The Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is seeking informal comments on administrative rules for the Shooting Sports Grant Program.

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 Education, Outreach, and Marketing Section: 571 Iowa Administrative Code (IAC) Chapter 56 (Shooting Sports Grant Program).

The chapter has been revised to eliminate redundancies, improve efficiency, and update the grant expense amount from \$500 to \$15,000 to reflect updated state finance bid requirements. The chapter has also been revised to recognize that the two grant programs (the shooting sports development grant program and the shooting sports equipment grant program) follow the same process with just a few differences. Instead of separate subsections for each grant program, the chapter was streamlined to recognize the same process applies to both programs, with the few differences between the programs identified as appropriate.

The public are invited to provide informal comments on the proposed rule changes. DNR will accept written comments through July 30, 2024. Written comments or questions regarding the proposed rules should be submitted to Megan.Wisecup@dnr.iowa.gov.

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 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>.