

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## Kunch family donation becomes popular hunting spot



*The steep and rolling hills of the 162-acre Kunch Wildlife Area shares the landscape with four ponds and small stands of cedars and shrubs for winter wildlife cover. Mixed in to the prairie is about 12 acres of food plots – sunflowers for doves, sorghum for pheasants. Photo courtesy of the Iowa DNR.*

TOLEDO, Iowa - George and Virginia Kunch left a legacy when they donated their 162-acre family farm in Tama County to the people of Iowa, in 2005.

Gone are the buildings, cottonwood trees and ag fields. In their place is a diverse reconstructed prairie with wild bergamot, prairie blazing star, cup plant, gray headed coneflower, ironweed, sunflowers and more. The steep and rolling hills of the Kunch Wildlife Area shares the landscape with four ponds and small stands of cedars and shrubs for winter wildlife cover.

As the prairie returned, grassland birds, like dickcissels, Henslow's sparrows, sedge wrens, goldfinches, and common yellowthroats, moved in. Northern harriers and smooth green snakes, both species in greatest conservation need (along with Henslow's sparrows), have been documented here.

Rodney Ellingson, wildlife biologist with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources' nearby Otter Creek office, said the area management plan includes using prescribed fire on different parcels to help keep the woody vegetation out of the prairie and rejuvenate the prairie plants.

"We need to vary the timing of our regular maintenance here to try to keep brome, Kentucky bluegrass and other invasives from expanding their presence onto the prairie," Ellingson said.

Mixed in to the prairie is about 12 acres of food plots – sunflowers for doves, sorghum for pheasants. The food plots are flip flopped every two years.

"Pheasant hunting is the biggest draw here. Dove season also packs them in. The parking lot can get filled pretty quickly on opening morning," he said.

The four ponds – each about an acre in size - were initially stocked with largemouth bass, bluegills and channel catfish, but with only one access point to the wildlife area – on the southwest corner – an angler will need to hike some distance to wet a line. Ponds also support broods of young Canada geese and mallards.

"This is a unique island of grassland in an ag dominated landscape that offers a little bit of everything," he said.

Kunch Wildlife Area is a few miles north of Otter Creek Lake, and 10 miles east of Union County Park.

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**Management planned for Eurasian watermilfoil found at Clear Lake**

CLEAR LAKE - The Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) recently discovered that Eurasian watermilfoil has spread in Clear Lake in Cerro Gordo County. A small area was originally found last fall east of the McIntosh Beach and treated this May. A larger area was found last week near Farmer's Beach.

"We are developing a short-term management plan to implement within the coming week and will work with local stakeholders and the community to develop a long-term plan of action," said Scott Grummer, fisheries biologist for the Iowa DNR.

The DNR is asking boaters and other users in these areas to be extra vigilant to help prevent the spread of these invasive aquatic plants to other lakes in the area.

"It is critical to clean all vegetation from boats and equipment before leaving boat ramps to prevent the spread of Eurasian watermilfoil," said Kim Bogenschutz, the DNR's aquatic invasive species program coordinator.

The Iowa DNR Aquatic Plant Management team monitors the vegetation in Clear Lake each year. This summer's monitoring has been especially important to evaluate the effectiveness of the treatment this spring and monitor any spread of Eurasian watermilfoil.

Eurasian watermilfoil, an invasive rooted aquatic plant native to parts of Europe and Asia, can spread quickly and outcompete beneficial native plants. It reproduces by fragmentation, which means small pieces of it grow into new plants and form thick beds.

Iowa's Aquatic Invasive Species Program has been a national leader in control efforts to stop Eurasian watermilfoil for the past 30 years.

"Iowa DNR has successfully eradicated the plant in many lakes throughout the state. The size of Clear Lake presents challenges for management," explains Grummer.

"Boaters and anglers can unintentionally spread Eurasian watermilfoil and other aquatic invasive species if they do not take the proper precautions before going between lakes and after each time out on the water," said Bogenschutz.

Clean, Drain, Dry is a simple three step process that boaters need to follow every time they move from one body of water to another.

- CLEAN any plants, animals or mud from the boat and equipment before you leave a water body.
- DRAIN water from all equipment (motor, live well, bilge, transom well, bait bucket) before you leave a water body.
- DRY anything that comes into contact with water (boats, trailers, equipment, boots, clothing, dogs). Before you move to another waterbody either: Spray your boat and trailer with hot, high-pressure water; or Dry your boat and equipment for at least five Days.

- Never release plants, fish or animals into a water body unless they came out of that water body and empty unwanted bait in the trash.

It is illegal to possess or transport prohibited aquatic invasive species, such as Eurasian watermilfoil, in Iowa. Boaters must also drain all water from boats and equipment before leaving a water access and must keep drain plugs removed or opened during transport.

Find more information about aquatic invasive species and a list of infested waters in the 2024 Iowa Fishing Regulations booklet or on the DNR's website at [www.iowadnr.gov/ais](http://www.iowadnr.gov/ais).

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