

# Iowa DNR News

CONSERVATION AND RECREATION

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## Paddling, hiking, hunting - even fishing a secluded trout stream - Turkey River Wildlife Area has a lot to offer



Four turkeys cautiously left the safety of the timber's cover to wander into a small alfalfa field to hunt for insects at the aptly named Turkey River Wildlife Area.

The 410-acre public area in southeast Howard County sits on a landscape transition from the glaciated northcentral Iowa to the Driftless northeast Iowa. With rock outcroppings and steep valleys, this oddly shaped public area is 1-1/2 mile south of Cresco and open for year-round recreation.

Visitors can go hiking, paddling, fishing, pick berries, hunt mushrooms in the spring and fall, hunt turkeys in the spring and fall, go snowshoeing and cross-country

skiing on ungroomed trails and hunt deer, squirrels, and, in the prairie by the ag fields, pheasants.

Two streams flow through the wildlife area: Turkey River, with a history of walleye and smallmouth bass fishing, and Chihak Creek, a small coldwater trout stream tucked in to the northeast corner with about 200 yards on public land. Chihak Creek has a self-sustaining brown trout population with fish up to 13 inches available. Anglers will need to park along the gravel road and hike a quarter mile to the stream.

Pulling in to the parking lot on the northwest side, a worn footpath leads to Steamboat Rock, a well-known local landmark overlooking a bend in the Turkey River, named for its resemblance to the historic steamboats. The return of drought conditions has dropped the river level and flow. Small fish can be seen against the mud bottom in the pools.

Hiking around to the top of Steamboat Rock reveals a small remnant hill prairie where leadplant, smooth blue aster, slender bush clover, silky aster side oats gramma, little bluestem and stiff goldenrod can be seen.

Roughly 75 acres of reconstructed prairie has returned to several small fields, where monarchs, dragonflies and bees were still active on this early October morning. Staff with the Iowa DNR's Upper Iowa Wildlife Unit manage prairie with prescribed fire and this past spring, 20-25 acres were burned and responded really well.

While the Turkey River Wildlife Area has reconstructed prairie, food plots and two streams, it is predominantly timber. The Iowa DNR has been working to improve the resource by emphasizing oaks and hickories, managing for aspens and improving the stand along the river bottom.

### **Diverse wildlife community**

The Iowa DNR's Multiple Species Inventory Monitoring (MSIM) program surveyed Turkey River several times since 2011 and confirmed a number of state and federally endangered species there, including the Indiana, northern long-eared and tri-colored bats, northern harrier, peregrine falcon, Henslow's sparrow, Acadian flycatcher, Canada darter, red shouldered hawk and more. The MSIM team confirmed American brook lamprey and black redhorse, both are state threatened fish species, in the Turkey River. Bobcats continue their expansion north and have been reported here.

### **Little Lake of the Woods**

Turkey River Wildlife Area was the site of a proposed 490-acre lake in the 1970s, called the Little Lake of the Woods, a reference to the legendary 950,000 plus acre lake on the Minnesota – Canada border. The original engineering design showed the lake winding west from the dam on the Howard-Winneshiek County line near what would be the west side of Cardinal Marsh.

There were road blocks that ultimately derailed the project, not the least of which was it required thousands of additional acres of land prior to construction. Supporters essentially had 10 percent of the land with the remainder yet to acquire.

### **Drainage dams**

Workers during the Great Depression placed stone and concrete dams in select drainages to help prevent erosion, many of which remain today.

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## Iowa stream flows concerning heading in to winter

After record low precipitation in September and October, drought conditions have reappeared across much of Iowa, causing river and stream flows to drop to similar levels as in 2023. Heading in to winter, the potential impacts to the fish and other aquatic organisms is concerning Iowa's fisheries experts.

"We were concerned about stream flows in northern Iowa a year ago, but the mild winter allowed us to sneak by – but some of these rivers with their lack of current and depth, if we get a normal winter, we could have them freeze to the bottom," said Scott Grummer, fisheries biologist for north central Iowa for the Iowa Department of Natural Resources. "Undoubtedly, we are going in to winter in low flow – if we have a harsh winter, fish survival may not be great."

Calls have come in to the Clear Lake office about yellow perch and channel catfish stranded in pools and struggling to survive near the headwaters of the East Fork of the Des Moines River.

"The moisture forecast for this week is a start, but we need frequent rains before winter arrives to overcome low soil moisture levels and then to generate runoff to increase stream flows," he said.

Grummer said Clear Lake has lost 20 inches of water since July, and the Winnebago River could be lower today, than last year. The low flows will impact other aquatic organisms and animals that depend up streams for food, water and habitat.

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## New snowmobile law streamlines permit requirements for residents

Iowa snowmobilers are no longer required to purchase and display an annual trail user permit, according to a new law that went into effect July 1, 2024. The law folded the trail user permit into the annual snowmobile registration fee, which will now be \$30 plus administration fees. The previous price for each type was \$15.

Registration and permit fees for snowmobiles are placed in a dedicated account for snowmobile programs in Iowa, including the Iowa Snowmobile Trail Grant Program, which is administered through the Iowa State Snowmobile Association. The grant program supports snowmobile trail development and grooming; equipment

purchases and maintenance; and trail signage in cooperation with snowmobile clubs all across Iowa.

Snowmobilers who own a new machine or have not yet entered the snowmobile into the state registration system need to go to the County Recorder's office in their county of residence to start the registration process. To renew an existing registration, visit the County Recorder or go online to [www.gooutdoorsiowa.com](http://www.gooutdoorsiowa.com)

Nonresident snowmobilers will still need to purchase and display the trail user permit, which are available at any County Recorder's Office, through retailers that sell hunting and fishing licenses, or online at [www.gooutdoorsiowa.com](http://www.gooutdoorsiowa.com).

Learn more about Iowa's snowmobile programs at: <https://www.iowadnr.gov/things-to-do/snowmobiles>

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## Iowa's furbearer season begins Nov. 2

Iowa's furbearer season opens Saturday and the outlook for trappers is positive – most species populations are steady, and there are some early indications wild fur pelt prices could be trending up this winter.

The challenge, however, could be that fewer marshes and streams have good water levels.

“Our water levels are similar to last year in some regions, even with a wet spring,” said Vince Evelsizer, state furbearer and wetland biologist with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR). “These wet/dry-dry/wet swings within a year can have an impact on aquatic furbearers – otters, mink, beavers and muskrats. But the upland species – bobcats, red fox, coyotes – are much less impacted.”

Evelsizer encouraged trappers to do some preseason scouting as marsh water levels vary by location with many either dry or drying by the day.

The furbearer season is Nov. 2 to Feb. 28, 2025. Beaver trapping closes on April 15, 2025.

### **Mentoring young trappers**

A regulation change allows youth age 15 and younger to go trapping with a licensed adult trapper without purchasing a license. This change brings trapping in line with hunting.

“This allows the youth to experience trapping to see if it is something they would enjoy without having to purchase a license,” Evelsizer said.

Each youth must be accompanied by a licensed adult.

### **Gray fox study**

The Iowa DNR will again be looking for live caught gray foxes as part of a pilot population study to learn more about this small, secretive woodland furbearer.

“We’re asking for the public and our trappers to contact us if they’ve recently seen a gray fox or catch a gray fox. Better yet, contact us in advance if you’re trying to catch a gray fox in your area. Private trappers are a valuable partner for this pilot project. We have one fox collared so far, and hope to add to that this year,” Evelsizer said.

The collar provides researchers with data on the fox’s movement, habitat preference and survivorship. There is a \$400 reward, provided by the Iowa Wildlife Federation, for anyone who catches a gray fox that can be used for this study.

He said the fox will be released on the site where it was caught.

The DNR is also working with Iowa State University on a pilot project this winter in northeast Iowa, using cameras to track fishers and gray foxes to determine what areas these species occupy and what areas they don’t occupy in this region.

“Other regions may be surveyed in the future, depending on how this study goes,” Evelsizer said.

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