

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Urban forestry awards recognize local dedication to trees and outreach

DES MOINES – Every year the Urban Forestry Awards luncheon recognizes cities, college campuses and utilities that demonstrate a variety of dedication to the importance of trees in their respective communities.

Awards will be presented April 3rd at the FFA Enrichment Center in Ankeny, on behalf of the Arbor Day Foundation and the Iowa Department of Natural Resources. A full list of award winners follows.

Tree City USA Award – To qualify for the Tree City USA award, a city must have either a city forester or an active city tree board, have a tree ordinance, spend at least \$2 per capita annually for its community forestry program, and have a tree planting and maintenance plan.

The award recipients are Adel, Ames, Arnolds Park, Atlantic, Belle Plaine, Bettendorf, Bondurant, Boone, Burlington, Carlisle, Carroll, Cedar Falls, Cedar Rapids, Clarinda, Clarksville, Clinton, Clive, Coralville, Council Bluffs, Cresco, Decorah, Denver, Des Moines, DeWitt, Dubuque, Dysart, Fort Dodge, Greene, Grimes, Grundy Center, Hampton, Hiawatha, Hillsboro, Hopkinton, Hudson, Huxley, Indianola, Iowa City, Jefferson, Johnston, Livermore, Luxemburg, Manchester, Maquoketa, Marion, Marquette, Marshalltown, Mason City, Maxwell, Mt Vernon, Muscatine, Nevada, Newton, North Liberty, Odebolt, Oelwein, Oskaloosa, Ottumwa, Pleasant Hill, Polk City, Red Oak, Sioux City, Spencer, Story City, Tipton, Urbandale, Van Horne, Washington, Waterloo, Waverly, Webster City, West Des Moines, and Winterset.

Tree City USA Growth Award – To qualify for the Tree City USA Growth award, cities must provide education and public relations, partnerships, planning and management, and tree planting and maintenance in their community.

The award recipients, which were also recipients of the Tree City USA award, are Ames, Arnolds Park, Bettendorf, Burlington, Cedar Rapids, Clinton, Coralville,

Decorah, Denver, Des Moines, Dysart, Grundy Center, Hampton, Hiawatha, Iowa City, Johnston, Marion, Marquette, Mason City, Oelwein, Polk City, Story City, Waverly, West Des Moines and Winterset.

Tree City of the World - Recognition through the Tree Cities of the World program represents the first step toward achieving a green vision for your city. To receive recognition, a town or city must meet five core standards: responsibility for the care of trees, official policy that governs the management of forests and trees, updated inventory or assessment, a dedicated annual budget for the routine implementation of the tree management plan and an annual celebration of trees.

Burlington, Decorah and Des Moines are this year's award recipients.

Tree Campus USA Award – To qualify for the Tree Campus USA award, a campus must have a campus Tree Advisory Committee, a tree care plan, a tree program with dedicated annual expenditures, an annual Arbor Day observance and a service learning project to engage the student body.

The award recipients are Clarke University, Divine Word College, Drake University, Hawkeye Community College, Iowa State University, Kirkwood Community College, Simpson College, University of Iowa, University of Northern Iowa and William Penn University.

Tree Line USA Award – To qualify for the Tree Line USA award, a utility must meet five minimum requirements, including quality tree care, annual worker training, tree planting and public education, a tree-based energy conservation program and an annual Arbor Day celebration.

The award recipients are Alliant Energy, MidAmerican Energy and Waverly Utilities.

Media contact: Emma Hanigan, Urban Forestry Coordinator, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 515-249-1732.

Iowa's pheasant season evolved over decades

Iowa's current 70-plus day long pheasant season, opening on the last Saturday in October through January 10 each year, is a long way from how it began. In the early years, from 1926-41, the season varied in length from 2-7 days, and pre-1933, it was only opened in counties where 150 landowners signed a petition to hold a season.

Shooting hours bounced around, too, from opening at noon until WW2 to avoid conflicts with morning farm work, to opening at 9 a.m., and then back to noon, then sunrise to sunset (for one year) before settling on 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., in 1966.

"It was surprising how ultra-conservative the seasons were early on, at a time when staff were fielding complaints that pheasants were damaging crops," said Todd Bogenschutz, upland wildlife research biologist with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources. "But wildlife biology and management were a new science; the impacts of hunting and habitat on populations were not well understood."

As the field of wildlife biology expanded, new research allowed staff to lengthen the season because the data showed harvesting only roosters had little impact on the population as a whole. Research also found that the pheasant population can be impacted by hunting late into winter, because hens are flushed along with roosters and exposed to risks from weather and predators.

Quail, Iowa's other popular resident game bird, is often compared to pheasants, except quail are legal to hunt through the end of January. Research has also shown that late winter hunting does not impact Iowa's quail population largely because quail can offset this loss through reproduction; quail can hatch four nests in a year whereas pheasants only produce one nest per year.

"That's a common question we get since South Dakota extended its season through the end of January in 2020 to encourage nonresident hunters to come. But we know that in states where the average snowfall exceeds 30 inches, hunting pheasants into late January can impact next year's population," Bogenschutz said.

"Weather in late January and February is almost always more severe than in November and December, and quality habitat becomes more limited due to the impact of deep snow on grassland habitats. Now with this past mild winter, it probably would have been fine, but in a severe winter it would really hammer the pheasants."

Winter is an important time for hen survival, he said, which has the largest influence on future populations. "On the flipside, we've had requests to open the season earlier in October, but this comes with its own set of issues," Bogenschutz said.

"It's a curve – this past fall we had a lot of young roosters that hadn't fully colored up due to later nesting because of the floods in June," he said. "An earlier opener would also mean warmer temperatures which can impact both hunters and dogs, and likely lead to more standing crops on opening day. It can also conflict with duck and goose openers.

"We know that hunters like consistency of the current season structure. It's a reasonable time when most roosters are recognizable, most of the crops are harvested, and it protects pheasants for future generations."

Did You Know: Iowa moved its opening day of pheasant season back one day in 1959, to avoid a conflict with the Iowa-Minnesota football game (won by the Hawks 33-0).

A century of pheasant hunting

The Iowa DNR and Pheasants Forever are celebrating 100 years of pheasant hunting in the Hawkeye State. The first season was held Oct. 20-22, 1925, when 13 counties in north central Iowa were opened to pheasant hunting. Hunters were allowed a three-rooster limit, for a half-day of hunting. An estimated 75,000 hunters participated.

Hunters can commemorate the 100th anniversary by purchasing a hard card featuring Iowa Pheasants Forever Print of the Year when they purchase their 2025 hunting and fishing licenses.

Information on places to hunt, the August roadside survey results and more is available online by clicking the 100 Years of Pheasant Hunting graphic at www.iowadnr.gov/pheasantsurvey.

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

Prairie Chicken Day canceled due to low bird numbers

Kellerton, Iowa - The Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has canceled the upcoming Prairie Chicken Day due to the decline in the local population to the point where staff have only observed sporadic use by a few male prairie chickens of the main Kellerton lek.

The effort to return the prairie chicken to Ringgold County, Iowa, and Harrison County, Missouri, had begun in 1987, when wild birds captured primarily in Kansas and Nebraska, with a few coming from South Dakota, were released in the area. Ringgold and Decatur counties had been identified as offering the best habitat to support prairie chickens in Iowa.

The last significant translocation effort was in 2017. Since then, the population has shown a steady decline with a few years of stability, but no significant increases to indicate a growing population have been recorded. DNR staff are continuing to conduct surveys for the birds and would appreciate any reports of prairie-chickens outside of the Kellerton Wildlife Area.

The effort to return the birds to its native area was a partnership between the Iowa DNR, the Blank Park Zoo, Missouri Department of Conservation, Nebraska Game and Parks and The Nature Conservancy.