

Iowa DNR News

CONSERVATION AND RECREATION

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Walleye netting season starts for Iowa DNR fish hatcheries



Iowa DNR fisheries biologist Mark Flammang holds a female walleye at the Rathbun Fish Hatchery that was collected as part of the annual walleye netting and egg collection effort that is the source for walleyes stocked in Iowa's lake and rivers. Photo courtesy of the Iowa DNR.

MORAVIA – The late night, annual walleye collection has begun at Rathbun and Storm lakes and will begin in the next few days at East Okoboji and Spirit lakes.

Crews with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources Fisheries Bureau set gillnets at night in traditional areas looking for walleyes that are ready to spawn.

This time of year, hatcheries operate into the wee hours of the morning as local staff bring in the nightly haul well past midnight. As fish “ripen,” the eggs are removed from the walleyes and the fish are returned to the lake where they were caught to make room for the next night’s catch.

The goal is to collect enough fish to hatch 114 million walleye fry that will supply Iowa lakes and fish hatcheries.

The Rathbun and Spirit Lake fish hatcheries are open and ready for visitors. Contact the individual hatchery you intend to visit for visitor hours.

Media Contact: Jay Rudacille, Iowa DNR Warm and Coolwater Fish Culture Supervisor, 641-647-2406.

Iowa’s spring turkey season is here



A mild winter followed by timely spring rains has Iowa forests and woodlots leafing out ahead of spring turkey season, possibly tipping the playing field in favor of the gobblers, after a record harvest of more than 16,000 birds in 2024.

The first of Iowa’s four regular spring turkey seasons opens on April 14.

“We are greening up ahead of schedule,” said Jim Coffey, forest wildlife research biologist with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR). “For anyone hunting second season or later, it could be a jungle out there.”

Winter turkey flocks are breaking up and birds are spreading across the landscape. Turkey production has been above the five-year average for three of the past four years, providing good numbers of birds, especially two-year-old jakes.

“Jakes will usually respond to calls more easily than toms and have been known to come in in groups – if a group of jakes come in, make sure you have a clean shot at one bird,” Coffey said.

Although Iowa has set spring turkey harvest records twice since 2020, Coffey said it's important to remember that historically, only one in five hunters will tag a bird.

“Success should be determined by time spent outside, watching the sunrise as the timber comes alive around you, the experience in the woods, not by bagging a turkey,” he said. “Spring turkey hunting is a close, intimate sport, where the excitement is happening in less than 30 yards. And with the early leaf out this year, it could be even closer.”

To improve the chances of bagging a turkey, Coffey said hunters should go through their equipment to make sure it all works and gear still fits before hiking into the timber on opening morning. He also said that the ticks are already out so plan accordingly.

Iowa's first of four turkey seasons opens on the second Monday in April each year, and this year, that's the middle of April, aligning turkey hunting with mushroom hunting season.

“If we get rain and a little heat – it should be a good year for mushroom hunting – which also means we need to be aware of other people in the woods – hunters need to identify their bird, make sure it has a beard, and what's beyond it,” Coffey said.

One final tip, Coffey said don't overlook Iowa's smaller woodlots, as they are typically good places to hunt.

Successful hunters are required to report their harvest by midnight of the day after it is recovered by going online at www.iowadnr.gov, calling the toll free phone number printed on the tag, at any license vendor during regular business hours, by texting your registration number to 1-800-771-4692 or through the Go Outdoors Iowa app.

“Best way for turkey hunter to help with conservation is to report your harvest,” he said.

Youth-only season is April 11-13

Youth turkey season is designed to provide a strong mentoring experience for the youth hunter. It is restricted to Iowa residents only.

“Turkey hunting is an intimate sport and mentoring is a way to learn from other's mistakes,” Coffey said. “With only about one-in-five hunters tagging a turkey, failure is part of the process. A successful hunt should be gauged on the adventure and experience of being in the woods not placing a tag on a bird.”

Youth tags are sold through the end of youth season on April 13. Youth tags are valid for youth season and each of the four regular seasons until filled or when the season four closes on May 18.

Licenses are not sold after the youth season closes.

2025 spring turkey season dates

- Youth Season, residents only, age 15 and younger - April 11-13

- Season 1 - April 14-17
- Season 2 - April 18-22
- Season 3 - April 23-29
- Season 4 - April 30 – May 18

The youth season license is good until filled, but it must be purchased before the youth season closes.

Around 50,000 turkey licenses will be purchased this year. Hunters may purchase two turkey tags, with at least one for season four. Shooting hours are one half hour before sunrise to sunset.

Media Contact: Jim Coffey, Forest Wildlife Research Biologist, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 641-774-2958.

Spirit Lake Hatchery filling with northern pike



Northern pike spawning season concludes at the Spirit Lake Fish Hatchery ahead of walleye netting. Photo courtesy of the Iowa DNR.

SPIRIT LAKE - Crews with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources placed fyke nets in the outlets of the sloughs that flow into Big Spirit Lake on March 1 to start collecting northern pike. Northern pike spawn in sloughs and shallow vegetated areas around the Iowa Great Lakes prior to ice leaving the lakes.

A total of 133 adult northern pike were collected in one day. The fish were transported to the Spirit Lake Hatchery. The broodstock produced more than 600,000 eggs which are currently being incubated in special jars that allow fresh water to flow over the eggs, supplying oxygen.

In less than two weeks, the fry will hatch and be stocked into Iowa's shallow lakes.

The Spirit Lake Hatchery is open to the public. Starting Thursday, April 10, hours of operation will be 8 a.m. - 8 p.m., every day, including weekends, until netting is completed. Up to date hours the hatchery will be open to the public is available on the hatchery answering machine and on a sign posted on the front door.

Media Contact: Kim Hawkins, Spirit Lake Fish Hatchery Manager, 712-336-1840.

Improve paddling skills with DNR canoe and kayak schools

Naturalists, youth group leaders and others who take people out on the water in canoes and kayaks are encouraged to attend one of the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) paddling schools.

Participants will learn paddling skills, how to identify hazard and river features, tips for teaching different learning styles, and risk management strategies. Instruction time will be one-third classroom and two-thirds on-water in both lake and river environments, solo and tandem.

All courses will be taught at Briggs Woods, along the Boone River in Hamilton County. The canoe school is limited to 12 participants and the kayak school is limited to 8 participants. This is not a beginner level course; participants should have previous paddling experience.

The schedule for 2025 paddling schools is:

- July 8-9, Canoe School
- July 22-23, Kayak School
- 26-27, Kayak School
- 3-4, Canoe School

DNR paddling schools are designed for either canoeing or kayaking instruction. Make sure you register for your preferred instruction. Registration fee is \$65 for each two-day course. Overnight accommodations are not included in the registration fee. Participants have the options to camp, rent a cabin, or stay in Webster City at a motel while participating in the two-day school.

To register or for more information, go to <https://www.iowadnr.gov/things-do/paddling-river-recreation/how-paddle/canoe-kayak-schools>. Get your registration in quickly, these classes fill up fast.

Media Contact: Todd Robertson, Iowa DNR River Programs Outreach Coordinator, 515-205-6845.

Three Iowa state parks to host Take It Outside camps this summer

The Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) will host Take It Outside camps for families living near Walnut Woods, Maquoketa Caves and Ledges state parks.

Take It Outside State Park Camps are 5-day immersive adventures where campers explore what makes each park unique and amazing, from its habitats to its history, plants and animals, and the interconnectedness of it all.

The camps are for students entering 3rd-6th grade. Activities incorporate STREAM (science, technology, research, engineering, the arts and math) concepts through exciting adventures focused on forestry, fisheries, wildlife and ecology.

Dates of each day camp are:

- Walnut Woods State Park (West Des Moines): June 23-27
- Maquoketa Caves State Park (Maquoketa): July 14-18
- Ledges State Park (Madrid): July 21-25

Camp instructors and group leaders include licensed teachers and DNR professionals. Outdoor skills sessions will foster confidence, teamwork and a desire to spend more time outside.

Registration is open until May 30. Enrollment is limited to 30 students per camp. To register and learn more about the camps visit: www.iowadnr.gov/programs-services/education-learning/take-it-outside-state-park-camps.