

Iowa DNR News

CONSERVATION AND RECREATION

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- [Stay sober and alert on the water this Fourth of July weekend](#)
- [Red Haw State Park campground opening July 1](#)
- [Pheasant population expected to benefit from mild winter](#)
- [Volga River State Recreation Area offers year round recreation](#)
- [DNR shares tips for a safe Fourth of July holiday weekend](#)
- [Help stop aquatic hitchhikers this Fourth of July](#)
- [Iowa's Scholastic Clay Target Program Skeet Championships](#)
- [Fishing regulations to be relaxed at Dunlap Pond](#)

Stay sober and alert on the water this Fourth of July weekend

DES MOINES - State, federal and local law enforcement agencies encourage all boaters to avoid alcohol and drugs this busy holiday weekend to ensure everyone's safety on Iowa waters.

Operation Dry Water, July 4-6, is a national campaign to reduce the number of alcohol- and drug-related incidents and fatalities on the water throughout the year. This effort to deter impaired boating and enforce Iowa's boating while intoxicated (BWI) laws reminds boaters to stay sober and alert, always wear your life jacket, and take a boating safety education course.

"Recognizing that impaired boating is as dangerous as impaired driving is vital," said Susan Stocker, boating law administrator and education coordinator for the Iowa DNR. "Together, we can prevent incidents and save lives."

Alcohol and drugs (legal and illegal) can severely impair a boater's judgment, reaction time and ability to operate a vessel safely. The effects of alcohol, drugs and some medications can be intensified when combined with sun, wind and wave action.

Alcohol use is the leading contributing factor in recreational boating fatalities. The risk of serious injury is equal for operators and passengers. Intoxicated passengers can easily slip, fall overboard or suffer other life-threatening incidents.

"One-third of all boating fatalities nationally involved alcohol," explained Stocker. "Many of those victims were innocent bystanders."

In 2024, the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and its partners contacted more than 1,296 vessels containing 5,015 boaters resulting in 477

citations or warnings as part of Operation Dry Water.

The DNR has partnered with the U.S. Coast Guard, the Army Corps of Engineers, and local police and sheriff's departments as part of previous Operation Dry Water campaigns.

2024 top areas for BWI arrests Coralville Reservoir: 4

Clear Lake: 1 Lake Manawa: 1 Rathbun Reservoir: 1 Total BWI: 13

2023 top areas for BWI arrests Okoboji: 5

Clear Lake: 3 Saylorville Reservoir: 3 Coralville Reservoir: 2 Lake Manawa: 2
Rathbun Reservoir: 4 Mississippi River: 2 Total BWI: 27

2022 top areas for BWI arrests Okoboji: 7 Coralville Reservoir: 6 Mississippi
River: 5 Missouri River: 5 Rathbun Reservoir: 5 Total BWI: 36

2021 top areas for BWI arrests Mississippi River: 8 Coralville Reservoir: 6
Missouri River: 3 Okoboji: 3 Rathbun Reservoir: 3 Total BWI: 31

Media Contact: Susan Stocker, Boating Law Administrator and Education
Coordinator, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 515-313-6439.

Red Haw State Park campground opening July 1

CHARITON – The campground at Red Haw State Park will open starting July 1, 2025 after being closed for three years due to extensive tornado damage.

According to Chad Kelchen, district supervisor for the DNR Parks, Forests and Preserves Bureau, the renovated campground provides an improved layout, upgraded utilities and pull-through sites with lake views.

"We are excited for campers to visit Red Haw and enjoy this beautiful hidden gem," said Kelchen. "We greatly appreciate the local community support we received over the last three years as we worked to clean up Red Haw, and we look forward to welcoming campers to enjoy the renovated campground."

On March 5, 2022 an EF3 tornado crossed through the middle of Red Haw State Park, destroying several buildings, downing dozens of trees and damaging campground infrastructure.

Improvements include larger sites with pull-through capabilities; 41 electrical sites with 50-amp service; a newly renovated beach shelter; improved accessibility; a new fish cleaning dock and new kayak launch. Additionally, 100 percent of campsites will be reservable through the online system, offering the ability to make same-day reservations.

Campers can start making reservations for Red Haw State Park at 9:00 a.m. on June 30, with the same-day window closing at 10:00 p.m. each day.

Reservations can be made at <https://iowastateparks.reserveamerica.com/>, or by calling (877) 427-2757. The "iron ranger," where paper reservations were inserted at the campground kiosk, has been removed. Campers driving to the park looking for walk-in reservations will be directed to the online site.

Pheasant population expected to benefit from mild winter

Iowa's pheasant population is expected to benefit from the 2024-25 mild winter and average spring that much of the state experienced.

According to Iowa's state climatologist, last winter was the fourth least snowy in 138 years, and the spring was normal for rainfall and temperature.

"Given the statewide information, we are expecting a good nesting effort and our weather model is predicting pheasant populations will likely be higher for the 2025 hunting season," said Todd Bogenschutz, upland wildlife biologist for the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR).

The Iowa DNR's weather model is based on 50 years of weather data and roadside pheasant counts. "I expect there will be regional differences, but hopefully we will see nice increases in all survey regions," he said.

The Iowa DNR conducts its annual upland population survey each August, which is the best indicator of what populations will be this fall. Results from the August roadside survey will be available online at www.iowadnr.gov/pheasantsurvey around Sept. 15.

Reports of hens with chicks started in southern Iowa in middle May and sightings have since been reported from across the state.

"When we have early nesting years, we typically have the highest number of chicks and it is looking like 2025 will be an early nesting year," Bogenschutz said.

Hens will begin incubating after the last egg is laid and eggs hatch after 23 days of incubation, with peak hatch Iowa occurring June 10-15. The young pheasants begin to make short flights – around five feet – at 10 days old and can keep up with the hen on longer flights after another five days.

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.

Volga River State Recreation Area offers year round recreation

At nearly 5,800 acres, Volga River State Recreation Area is hard to miss.

Just a few miles north and east of Fayette, Volga River has two campgrounds, one offering services to equestrians, and one offering services to traditional recreation vehicle campers with modern amenities; 22 miles of rugged trails, nearly all multi-use; a lake, a river, and the opportunity to hunt much of the timber prairie complex.

"There's not a lot of outdoor experiences that you can't do at Volga," said Austin Lette, park manager at Volga River State Recreation Area for the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR). Hunting, hiking, camping, a 20-target archery course, wild edibles, paddling, fishing, horseback riding, mountain biking, wildlife watching and more.

An area of this size and diversity takes a lot of work to manage the resource and maintain the facilities.

Jason Auel, wildlife biologist with the Iowa DNR, said the forest wildlife stewardship plan included a recent 20-acre clear cut on a ridge near the western entrance that had been under planted before the cut was done.

"We will begin a forest stand improvement with the goal to keep the oaks we have on Volga," Auel said. "And we have plans on converting a good portion of the ag fields into prairie and timber. In three to five years, it will look a lot different."

Work on the conversion began this spring when 120 acres of former ag fields were seeded to prairie, and 12 acres were planted to trees.

"As the timber and prairie habitat is improved, we hope to see an increase in the bird community," Auel said.

One bird in particular that they hope will return is ruffed grouse.

"Volga use to be a ruffed grouse hotspot and we're actively trying to bring them back," he said. "We've identified 100 different Aspen stands this winter and had begun work to improve and cut them to benefit the grouse."

Ruffed grouse require a specific Aspen stand stem density associated with young, vigorous forests that often are the result of a clear cutting, fire or other disturbance, and must be conducted every 15-20 years to avoid population decline.

In 2024, there was a report of a grouse drumming here, so the DNR hosted a grouse survey and deployed four audio recording devices this spring hoping to hear one. Unfortunately, they came up empty.

"By focusing on improving grouse habitat, we hope they will come back naturally," Auel said. "But even if they don't show up, the habitat benefits for the area will be huge."

Volga is already a popular place to hunt squirrels, deer and turkeys and for hunters to stay in the campgrounds each fall.

The modern campground has 41 campsites: 38 full hookups, two with electric and water, and one electric only. "They're busy all the time," Lette said. "People really like the concrete pull-throughs."

Campsites towards the back of the campground are a little more secluded and people like that experience, too, he said.

"Most state parks are around 1,000 acres or less. Volga is around 5,800 acres of natural land, has different ecosystems – river, lake, forest, prairie. It's northeast Iowa, arduous, rugged and rocky. It really has something for everyone, sightseeing, birding, mountain biking, whatever you want to do, you can probably find it here."

Lette said Volga River's extensive trail system is in the process of getting a new rock surface and the hope is, that once the new surface is down, the section of trail could be open for equestrian use during wet conditions.

"We received a trail grant to help pay for the project and started rocking the southwest quadrant of trails last summer," he said.

The primary difference between a state park and a state recreation area is hunting. Hunting is allowed in a state recreation area, with the 200-yard setback from any campground or occupied building.

"We get a lot of calls from hunters, especially turkey hunters from the southeast – North Carolina, Mississippi," Lette said. "We're getting more turkey hunters here than in the past."

Auel said local hunters have been asking about adding some dove fields, which they did last year, and have expanded to 30 acres of sunflowers this year.

Work is also continuing on infrastructure projects that has required the equestrian campground to be temporarily closed this summer to allow contractors to replace a bridge with a box culvert. There is also a plan to install a number of sediment basins to intercept sediment and nutrients before entering the lake.

Management and habitat projects have come from across the agency: fisheries, forestry, parks and wildlife.

"It's really good when we have an opportunity like this to all work together," Auel said.

Grand Plans for Volga River

There were big plans for Volga River in the 1960s - a 1,200-acre lake, 3-4 campgrounds with around 200 campsites, cabins, and a ski lift that would take sledders to the top of a long sledding hill. As with many projects, as work progressed and costs rose, the grand plans had to be modified and downsized.

Case in point, the 1,200-acre lake.

The ground under where the large lake was planned consisted of fractured limestone and unable to hold water. So after a few redesigns and downsizing, the lake was scaled back to the current 135 acres.

Fishing action is good in the lake, but the size of fish is marginal.

Media Contacts: Jason Auel, Wildlife Biologist, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 319-213-2815, or Austin Lette, Park Manager, Volga River State

DNR shares tips for a safe Fourth of July holiday weekend

DES MOINES – The Fourth of July holiday weekend draws thousands of people to Iowa state parks, beaches, lakes and rivers. Follow these tips and precautions to keep you, your friends and family safe this holiday weekend.

Beach & Swimming Safety

Water is refreshing and fun, but it's essential to know how to stay safe in and around water to prevent accidental drownings. Stay safe wherever you choose to swim, whether **it's a backyard pool, a pond or lake, or a public pool.**

- Keep a close eye on others, especially children. Assign a designated adult to watch over children, and never assume someone else is watching them. Be close enough to touch the child at all times. Even in ankle deep water, the current can be strong enough to sweep you off your feet and out into deeper water.
- Swim with a buddy.
- Avoid swimming or wading in rivers.
- If you haven't swam in a long-time, refresh your abilities. *All children* should learn to swim with formal lessons.
- Always wear a life jacket. Make sure kids wear their life jackets before getting in the water.
- Avoid alcohol while swimming.
- Stay within the roped-in area of the lake.
- Obey posted signs and flags.
- Learn how to perform CPR. If you are already certified, learn the latest techniques and refresh your skills by recertifying. Check with your local hospital, workplace or doctor's office for training opportunities.
- Take a water bottle with you and keep it nearby throughout the day. It's easy to get dehydrated in the sun, particularly if you're active and sweating.
- Note that
 - Iowa's public beaches do not have lifeguards on duty.
 - Alcohol is prohibited at some public beaches.
 - Glass bottles are prohibited on beaches.
 - Pets are prohibited on beaches.

Boating Safety

- Plan ahead and avoid peak hours and large crowds of boating.
- Park your vehicles and trailers in designated parking spaces NOT in grass areas or they will be ticketed and towed.
- Alcohol and boating don't mix. Wind, sun glare and heat can enhance the effects of alcohol, hindering the operator's ability to make necessary

decisions.

- The same limit of .08 for operating a vehicle under the influence applies to boating.
- Always have a designated operator that avoids consuming alcohol.
- File a float plan with a friend, including your destination, expected time of return and type of boat.
- Always wear a properly fitted lifejacket. Kids under age 13 must wear a life jacket at all times when the boat is underway. The vessel must have enough life jackets for all members on board.
- Check for open ramps or water hazards before heading out.
- Before leaving the house, check the trailer lights, wheel bearings and the hitch.
- Make sure there is a current fire extinguisher and horn/whistle, a wearable life jacket for everyone and a USCG approved throwable device onboard.
- Slow down and watch for other boaters or personal watercraft, have patience.
- Avoid dams and other hazards on waterways.
- Obey all posted warning signs and rules.
- Drain plugs and other water draining devices must be removed and/or remain open during transport to help prevent the spread of aquatic invasive species to new water bodies.
- Take a boater education course. Iowa law requires any person 12-17 years old, who will operate a motorboat over ten horsepower or a personal watercraft, to successfully complete the education program.

State Park and Forest Campground Safety

The Fourth of July is one of the busiest times to visit a state park as people enjoy beaches and outdoor activities in the summer sun.

- Pack snacks, food, water and personal hygiene products to bring along for hiking and other recreational activities in state parks. Stay hydrated with plenty of fluids. Pack bug spray and sunscreen.
- Keep pets on leashes.
- Slow down on park roadways and obey posted speed limit signs. Families and kids are often walking or biking on the roads.
- Share the trail – be aware of hikers, bikers and equestrians when using multi-use trails. Bikers yield to hikers and horseback riders. Give plenty of space and communicate your presence to keep everyone safe.
- If a parking lot becomes full at a park or campground, staff may temporarily close the parking lots and limit the number of visitors at that point. If there is no parking available, do not park in the grass areas, along roadways or any other area that is not a designated parking lot. Violators will be cited.
- If a park is busy, consider visiting a nearby state park that is less populated. Or visit the park during non-peak times, which often include mornings and evenings.
- "Carry In, Carry Out"—pick up any trash and carry out what you carry into the park.
- Don't transport firewood; buy it locally. Burn all the firewood at your campsite rather than leaving it or transporting it to a new area.

- Use designated fire rings or grills, and fully extinguish fires when done. Don't burn trash.
- Be respectful of your neighbors camping around you. Keep noise levels low, especially at night.
- Check [the DNR website for current alerts and closures](#).
- If you plan to fish, be sure to have a current fishing license. Anyone 16 years and older must have a fishing license to fish Iowa waters. You can purchase one by visiting: <https://gooutdoorsiowa.com/>, or by downloading the Go Outdoors Iowa app on your mobile device through the Google Play store or the App Store. You can also buy your fishing license at some retailers in your area.

Paddling Safety

Whether it be tubing, kayaking or canoeing, paddlers are enjoying the splash of the water, scenic views, and wildlife viewing from Iowa's rivers, rapids and streams. Many new paddlers are getting out on the water for the first time this summer.

- Always wear your life jacket. Kids 12 and under must wear a life jacket at all times when the vessel is underway. Iowa law requires life jackets on every watercraft, whether it's a motorized boat, jet ski, kayak, canoe, or even a paddleboard.
- Never paddle rain swollen rivers, rapids or streams that are at or near flood stage.
- Paddle with a group, not by yourself.
- Tell a friend or loved one where you will be paddling, including what access to what access, and when you are expected to return. It will be easier to find you if you need help.
- Know and understand your river levels and flows, as well as the weather forecast.
- Avoid swimming, wading, paddling or boating near low-head dams. Often difficult to see from upstream, low-head dams have deadly recirculating currents. Watch for warning signs, listen for rushing water, and get out and scout when in doubt.
- Learn about and study your route in advance. Know where your take-out access is located, how many river miles downstream, and how long it is going to take to get there.
- Check the Iowa [DNR's interactive paddler's map](#) for updates on real-time hazards like downed trees and log jams, strainers and bridge construction. Pay attention to the dam warning signs and know where dams are located before you head out on the water. Bridge construction projects across Iowa could close some sections of rivers this summer.
- Bring along a dry bag with a set of extra clothes you can change into if you get wet, a first-aid kit and a protected cell phone or weather radio.
- Pack plenty of water to stay hydrated. Wear light, loose fitting clothing that dries quickly. Wear a hat, sunglasses and plenty of sunscreen.
- Find individual water trail maps, including access points at iowadnr.gov/water-trail-maps.

Fireworks Safety

Fireworks are a spectacular and traditional way to celebrate the Fourth of July.

- **Fireworks are strictly prohibited in state parks; only sparklers are allowed.**
- Fireworks can cause serious burns and eye injuries. The Iowa Department of Public Health encourages families to make sure an adult supervises fireworks and keeps young children from playing with or igniting them.
- Keep fireworks pointed away from you and others when igniting them, and back up quickly after lighting. If fireworks don't ignite or burn fully, don't try to relight them or pick them up. Keep a bucket of water or hose on hand to respond to a fire or mishap.
- If you have asthma or other lung impairments, be aware of air quality conditions following firework shows, which can temporarily emit smoke and small particulates in the air, impacting breathing.
- Pick up litter and dispose of any unused fireworks in a safe manner.

Media Contacts: Todd Robertson, Iowa DNR River Programs Outreach Coordinator, 515-205-6845 or Susan Stocker, Iowa DNR Boating Law Administrator and Education Coordinator, 515-313-6439.

Help stop aquatic hitchhikers this Fourth of July

The Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) reminds all boaters and anglers to check for unwanted hitchhikers on their boats and equipment this Fourth of July to help protect Iowa lakes and streams.

Aquatic invasive species move from one water body to another by hitchhiking on boats, in bait buckets and on other equipment used in the water. They can create serious problems for Iowa waters and negatively impact the quality of outdoor recreation experiences.

"Aquatic invasive species can reduce native species and make lakes and rivers unusable for boaters, anglers and swimmers," said Kim Bogenschutz, aquatic invasive species coordinator for the Iowa DNR.

These invasive species often grow quickly and spread fast when brought to another lake or stream due to a lack of natural predators or competitors.

Boaters and anglers can help prevent the spread of aquatic invasive species to new water bodies by cleaning, draining and drying their boats and equipment after each time on the water.

- **CLEAN** any plants, animals, or mud from your boat and equipment before you leave a waterbody.
- **DRAIN** water from all equipment (motor, live well, bilge, transom well, bait bucket) before you leave a waterbody and leave drain plugs out during transport.
- **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 or 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 waterbody and always empty unwanted bait in the trash.

These steps are not only recommendations; they are the law. It is illegal to possess or transport aquatic invasive species, transport any aquatic plants on water-related equipment, and transport boats with drain plugs intact in Iowa. It is also illegal to introduce any live fish or plants, except for hooked bait, into public waters.

Learn more about aquatic invasive species, including a list of infested waters in the current *Iowa Fishing Regulations* or at www.iowadnr.gov/ais.

Media Contact: Kim Bogenschutz, Fisheries Bureau's Aquatic Invasive Species Program Coordinator, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 515-290-0540.

Iowa's Scholastic Clay Target Program Skeet Championships

332 athletes from 39 Iowa teams participated in the 2025 Iowa Scholastic Clay Target Program (SCTP) Skeet Championships on June 18-21, at the New Pioneer Gun Club, in Waukee.

The Pella Christian Eagles took home top Varsity Skeet Squad honors, while Ankeny Centennial Jaguars Shooting Sports took home Women's first place Individual honors and Des Moines Clay Crushers took home Men's first place Individual honors.

Find a complete list of all results online at <https://app.sssfonline.com/nationals/4756>

Women's Varsity Individual Skeet

1. Lauren Harmon, Ankeny Centennial Jaguars Shooting Sports - 144 Points
2. Lily Jennings, Ankeny Centennial Jaguars Shooting Sports - 143 Points
3. Brynnlee Van Wyk, PC Eagles - 141 Points, by way of reverse run

Men's Varsity Individual Skeet

1. Owen McConville 5th, Des Moines Clay Crushers - 150 Points
2. Deacon Boot, PC Eagles - 149 Points
3. Treyton Vos, PC Eagles - 148 Points

Skeet Varsity Squads

1. Pella Christian Eagles, 443 Points
2. Ankeny Centennial Jaguars Shooting Sports, 430 Points
3. Des Moines Clay Crushers, 425 Points

The Skeet All-State Teams are determined by combining a Senior Division athlete's league and state skeet championship event scores. A total of 350 points is possible.

Ladies Skeet - All-State Team

1. Quincy O'Donnell, Underwood Youth Trap Team, Captain - 339 Points
2. Megan Vos, Oskaloosa Shooting Team - 338 Points
3. Lily Jennings, Ankeny Centennial Jaguars Shooting Sports - 337 Points
4. Lauren Harmon, Ankeny Centennial Jaguars Shooting Sports - 333 Points
5. Madalynn Schroder, Pella Shooters Team, Inc - 331 Points

Men's Skeet - All State Team

1. Owen McConville 5th, Des Moines Clay Crushers, Captain - 350 Points
2. Deacon Boot, PC Eagles - 349 Points
3. Treyton Vos, PC Eagles - 348 Points
4. Maddux Heinen, PC Eagles - 347 Points
5. Dylan Uitermarkt, PC Eagles - 346 Points

Any Senior Division athlete competing in all three 2025 American Discipline State Championship Events (American Trap 16 yd. Singles, Skeet, and Sporting Clays) is eligible for membership on the High Over-All Team. A total of 600 points is possible.

Ladies High Over-All Championship Team

1. Megan Vos, Oskaloosa Shooting Team, Captain - 508 Points
2. Lily Jennings, Ankeny Centennial Jaguars Shooting Sports - 507 Points
3. Madalynn Schroder, Pella Shooters Club - 506 Points
4. Hayley Burke, Oelwein Trap Club - 505 Points
5. Quincy O'Donnell, Underwood Youth Trap Club - 505 Points

Men's High Over-All Championship Team

1. Dylan Uitermarkt, PC Eagles, Captain - 534 Points
2. Ledger Smith, Albia - 532 Points
3. Deacon Boot, PC Eagles - 529 Points
4. Hunter Uitermarkt, PC Eagles, 524 Points
5. Treyton Vos, PC Eagles - 522 Points

Iowa's SCTP teams that participated in the State Championship are eligible to attend the SCTP National Championships held at the Cardinal Center in Marengo, Ohio, July 12-19.

For more information on the Scholastic Clay Target or Action Shooting Programs in Iowa, contact Jonathan Jones at 515-313-8048 or Jonathan.Jones1@dnr.iowa.gov.

Fishing regulations to be relaxed at Dunlap Pond

DUNLAP - The Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) will relax the fishing regulations at Dunlap Pond starting July 1 to allow anglers to more freely harvest fish before the lake is completely drained as part of a plan to improve the lake's depth, habitat, and water quality.

Anglers with a valid fishing license may harvest any size or number of largemouth bass, bluegill, crappie, channel catfish, and all other fish species from Dunlap Pond. Any number of fishing poles or jug fishing will be allowed. Anglers must remain in sight of these lines at all times, and follow all other fishing regulations and area rules. Trot lines will be allowed (name and address must be attached), however lines may not be set across the entire water body. Nets, dynamite, poison, electric shocking devices, or any stupefying substances will not be allowed. It is illegal to sell fish or stock captured fish into public waters.

Relaxed fishing regulations for Dunlap Pond will remain in effect until October 1. Anglers may fish anywhere within the lake. DNR fisheries staff will collect game fish from the lake in late-summer and relocate them to other lakes in the area.

The lake will be drained beginning this fall to allow for dredging, the construction of an in-lake sediment basin, and other habitat and water quality features.

This project will continue through 2026. Once the lake is drained, lake users should expect no access to the lake until construction is completed.

For more information contact Southwest Iowa DNR Fisheries, at 712-250-0010.