

Iowa Outdoors
Iowa Department of Natural Resources
www.iowadnr.com

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April 13, 2004

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SPRING TURKEY HUNTING

By Joe Wilkinson
Iowa Department of Natural Resources

From a far ridge, he gobbled. I was sitting almost a half-mile away. On purpose. Ten days before the season opened, I only wanted to hear turkeys gobbling...not to see them. If I were that close, they would likely see me, too. That would change my plans for opening day of Iowa's spring turkey season.

I had walked in from a different direction and made myself comfortable in a deadfall on the edge of the Delaware County farm where I hunt. Misjudging the 90 minute drive and 15 minute uphill stroll, I had missed the sunrise turkey talk, as the big birds decide to fly down from their overnight roosts. Still, I could catch up on their conversation for a couple hours. My scouting trip was to see--no, *hear*—where they likely would be, as the first season gets underway, April 12. From the southeast, I heard a tom gobble four or five times over 15 minutes. Was it coming from the heavily wooded hillside, just south of 'my spot'? Close enough, but the property fence there often diverts early season hens and the love-struck toms strutting and calling to get their attention.

Across Iowa, more than 50,000 hunters are locking in plans for their own opening day. Some of us hunt early, in the weekday-only 'first season'. Others opt for the three later seasons, with weekend availability and extra days. All of us, though, are looking for the same thing; that bright bluish-white and red head in the sights of our turkey gun.

“It should be another pretty good season,” forecasts Todd Gosselink, turkey research biologist for the Department of Natural Resources. “Our (2003) brood survey indicated a slight decrease in poults, but the year before, that survey showed very good reproduction. There will be plenty of two-year-old toms around.” Hunters last year harvested more than 23,000 turkeys during the spring season.

Older birds are tougher to trick than the year-old jakes. However, they are also the target of choice for most hunters; the birds that will be strutting, drumming and cutting loose with those shrill, heart-stopping gobbles to attract hens during the breeding season. Many hunters--- probably most of us---would trade a guaranteed kill shot on a clueless jake for the opportunity just to *watch* a puffed up tom, full of feathered ego and the wildlife equivalent of testosterone, as it drags its wings, spits and drums, to impress the plastic decoy planted in front of him.

How you get that gobbler to you is what separates hunters. With a wide variety of blinds, decoys, calls, camouflage patterns and tactics, you can make it as complicated or difficult as you wish. “I’m a pretty aggressive hunter. I get out there and listen for gobbling turkeys and go to those,” relates Gosselink. “Some people prefer to sit in an area known to have turkeys and call them in. It really depends on what the birds are doing. If they are gobbling, that gives you a lot of options. If they are not, you might just have to set up and hope you can call some to you.”

I’m in the latter group. Each year on opening day, I head to the same wooded hillside, overlooking a creek and pasture. If I don’t accidentally walk *under* roosting birds, I try to set up about 50 to 100 yards from the pre-dawn gobbles. There is almost always turkey activity as dawn breaks. Even if none come within 100 yards or so right away, I usually get a mid-morning ‘walk through’ by a hen-hungry tom somewhere on my hillside.

With a jake and a couple hen decoys plugged into the rocky hillside, I go lightly on calling after a short series of ‘clucks’ and ‘puts’ at fly down. Which way works? Again, it depends on the situation—and your ability. “Quite a few hunters use the box call, then later in the season go to other calls,” says Gosselink. “I like the mouth calls. It keeps my hands free. There are a lot of methods out there. The best thing is to listen to the hens and try to mimic what they are doing. That’s your best chance.”

Hunters, Take Your Pick

There are four different ‘mini’ seasons for turkey hunters to consider. With Iowa’s electronic licensing system, hunters now have their choice of dates; up to the moment they buy their turkey tag. For many, weather is the big factor. A wet, windy or cold forecast pushes many to choose a later season.

There is no quota for resident hunters, beyond the three high-demand state forest areas. Residents can receive up to two tags, however one must be for the fourth (last) season. Nonresidents may not hunt in the popular ‘second season’.

April 12-15. Iowa’s first spring turkey season is also its shortest. Many first season hunters like the prospect of hunting ‘uneducated’ birds; their first brush with humans...since last year.

April 16-20. With the first weekend of the spring seasons, this period is the most popular among residents. Nonresidents are not allowed to hunt this season.

April 21-27. Besides a weekend, the third season offers a couple extra days, and usually warmer weather than the first two.

April 28-May 16. Though earlier hunters have pushed the turkeys around by now, this season offers 19 days and three weekends. Most hens are on nests by now, which can shift a tom's attention back to a hunter's calls.

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CAMPING CONTEST TO INCLUDE ALL STATE PARKS IN 2004

DES MOINES – The Iowa DNR is again offering the Explore Iowa Parks program that rewards campers for camping at Iowa State Parks. This year the camping program will include 53 state parks, recreation areas and forests.

"This is a great way for families and friends to explore Iowa and enjoy our state park system," said Sherry Arntzen, with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) state parks bureau. "Whether you like a weekend trip or a weeklong trip, camping is a great economical getaway."

Arntzen suggested that campers get a copy of the Iowa Travel Guide to take with them. "There are a lot of neat things to see and do in many Iowa communities close to the state parks," she said.

The program kicks-off May 14 in conjunction with free camping weekend and runs through Nov. 1. Brochures explaining the Explore Iowa Parks program will be available at state parks beginning May 14. The brochure, rules, entry form and prize information can also be found at www.exploreiowaparks.com.

Campers must keep their original camping registrations and mail them to the DNR by Nov. 1, 2004. Campers who mail in registrations for five of the participating parks get a postcard collection of Iowa State Parks and Preserves, photographed by Iowa artists. Those who camp at seven parks get the post card collection and a one-year subscription to the *Iowa Conservationist*, the colorful magazine published bi-monthly by the DNR. Campers who stay at 10 different parks get those two prizes, plus a chance in a grand prize drawing for one year of free camping in Iowa State Parks, Recreation Areas and Forests; a \$250 camping gear package; or a camping coupon book valued at \$91.

The camping gear package, valued at \$250, was donated by Sportsman's Warehouse in Ankeny.

The Explore Iowa Parks program is open to residents and nonresidents. For more information contact the DNR at 515/281-5602 or go to www.exploreiowaparks.com.

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VOLUNTEERS INVITED TO PARTICIPATE IN PRAIRIE RESCUE

DES MOINES - Volunteers are invited to take part in the 5th annual statewide Prairie Rescue scheduled for numerous weekends in April and May. Participants will help remove small trees and other woody species that threaten native prairies and/or will plant native wildflowers and grasses at the 25 Prairie Rescue sites across the state.

In a world quickly losing its biological diversity, the prairie claims the unenviable title of most endangered ecosystem on the planet. Prairie once occupied more than 70 percent of Iowa's landscape, but only 0.1 percent of Iowa's defining ecosystem remains intact today.

The pre-settlement prairie ecosystem was renewed by natural grazing and the periodic fires that swept over the landscape. These fires have been suppressed over the past 150 years. As a result, the prairie ecosystem now requires a great deal of management in order to remain healthy. Prairie remnants are scattered throughout the state in small patches, many of which are surrounded by encroaching invasive plants. Without the proper management, Iowa's remaining prairie remnants could be lost forever.

"We need to protect and enhance what little prairie we have left in Iowa," said Jeffrey Vonk, director of the Iowa Department of Natural Resources. The Prairie Rescue is a chance for Iowans to have a hand in saving the final vestiges of prairie. It is also a great opportunity for individuals and families to learn about their natural heritage and connect with the natural world that surrounds them.

Several private and public conservation groups, including the Loess Hills Preservation Society, Iowa Prairie Network, County Conservation Boards, Loess Hills Audubon Society, Keepers of the Land AmeriCorps and the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation are sponsoring this year's statewide Iowa Prairie Rescue event.

Please join us and get your hands dirty for a good cause. Those interested in volunteering should go to www.inhf.org/rescue2004.htm to find information on each of the 25 Prairie Rescue sites around the state. Volunteers should wear work clothes, gloves, and bring pruning tools if possible. Individuals, families and organizations are all invited to participate. No experience is necessary – simply bring an open mind for learning and a willingness to have some fun.

For more information, contact Alicia Hraha/IDNR/AmeriCorps , (515) 281-3134 or by email at Alicia.Hraha@dnr.state.ia.us or Pete Lovell/IDNR/AmeriCorps at Peter.Lovell@dnr.state.ia.us

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GOVERNOR VILSACK URGES IOWANS TO PLANT TREES FOR ARBOR MONTH

Des Moines – Every spring thousands of Iowans are engaged in tree planting and care programs across Iowa. In recognition of these efforts to improve Iowa’s landscape, Governor Tom Vilsack has declared April as Arbor Month in Iowa.

“Each year, during Arbor Month, the people of Iowa pay special attention to the benefits of our trees and dedicate themselves to the planting and management of all of Iowa’s trees and forests,” said Governor Vilsack. “By declaring April as Arbor Month in Iowa, I urge our citizens to participate in tree planting and maintenance programs that will ensure a more beautiful Iowa and to nurture, protect and wisely use Iowa’s natural wonder of trees.”

“One way that Iowans can help celebrate Arbor Month is to plant conservation trees and shrubs on their lands,” said John Walkowiak, chief of the Iowa Department of Natural Resources forestry bureau. “We are encouraging private landowners to explore options and alternatives where they can plant native trees and shrubs this year to prevent soil erosion, protect water quality and enhance wildlife habitat.”

The State Forest Nursery offers more than 40 different native tree and shrub conservation seedlings for planting on acreages for reforestation, soil erosion control and wildlife habitat. Conservation seedlings of native oaks, walnut, maples, native shrubs, such as chokecherry, serviceberry, and wild plum, and evergreens including white pine and Norway spruce are still available in good quantities. Conservation seedlings from the State Forest Nursery must be ordered in units of 100 plants that sell for \$25 to \$45 per hundred with a minimum order of 500 plants.

The State Forest Nursery also has smaller specialty packets available. The Songbirds packet has 20 trees and shrubs and sells for \$20. The Wildlife packet has 200 trees and shrubs and sells for \$90.

To order, check on availability or even to arrange for shipping to your home, call the State Forest Nursery at 1-800-865-2477.

For more information, contact Walkowiak at 515-242-5966.

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TWO PARK RANGERS GRADUATE FROM IOWA LAW ENFORCEMENT ACADEMY

DES MOINES - Two park rangers from the Iowa Department of Natural Resources state parks bureau graduated from the 13-week Iowa Law Enforcement Academy's Basic Training Class, at Camp Dodge.

Joshua Rembe, park ranger at Clear Lake State Park, participated in the April 2 graduation ceremony held in Urbandale for the 197th Basic Training Class. Rembe previously worked as a seasonal waters aide for the Law Enforcement Bureau. He began at Clear Lake on July 18, 2003.

Rylan Retallick, park ranger at Pikes Peak State Park/Yellow River Forest, graduated April 9 during the Law Enforcement Academy's 198th Basic Training Ceremony held in Johnston. Retallick began at Pikes Peak on September 12, 2003. He came from Lacey-Keosauqua where he was a manager of the park. Retallick had previously been a seasonal employee at George Wyth State Park.

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NATURAL RESOURCE COMMISSION TELECONFERENCE MEETING SET FOR APRIL 15

DES MOINES - The Natural Resource Commission (NRC) of the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) will meet via teleconference at 8:30 a.m., Thursday, April 15, in the fourth floor conference room, Wallace State Office Bldg., in Des Moines. The meeting is open to the public.

Members of the NRC are Joan Schneider, Randy Duncan, Paul Christiansen, Carol Kramer, William Sullivan, Richard Francisco and Janice Marcantonio. The DNR Director is Jeffrey Vonk.

The following is the agenda for the meeting.

- Approve Agenda
- Construction Projects
- Landowner Incentive Program Agreement
- Recreation Infrastructure Grants Review/Recommendations
- General Discussion
- Items for Next Meeting – May 13, Hitchcock Education Center, Pottawattamie County

For more information, contact Karyn Stone at 515-281-8650.

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IOWA FISHING REPORT

For the week of April 13, 2004

www.iowadnr.com

For current information on fishing conditions for your lake or area, contact the office in that district. Phone numbers are listed with each district report.

Northwest

Walleye, northern pike and muskie season is closed on Spirit Lake, East Okoboji and West Okoboji lakes in Dickinson County.

Spirit Lake (Dickinson): The crappie action continues to be good and is best on warm, sunny days. Fish the Templar Park Lagoon and the North Grade, but don't overlook the shallow water habitat in Angler's Bay. Wax worms and smaller jigs seem to be the bait of choice. Some anglers are using minnows. Smallmouth bass fishing is excellent. Fish the traditional rocky areas and expect the best action on calm, sunny days.

West Okoboji (Dickinson): Anglers are catching bluegills and crappies in the Triboji area.

Silver Lake (Dickinson): Anglers are catching 13 to 18-inch walleyes. The best fishing is early in the evening. Use twisters or a jig and minnow with a slow approach.

Lake Pahoja (Lyon): There is a huge population of channel catfish in Pahoja and now is the time to catch them.

Five Island (Palo Alto): Anglers are catching 13 to 18-inch walleye and surveys show good numbers of these fish are available.

West Fork of the Des Moines River (Emmet): Anglers are catching some nice walleyes by the tennis courts.

Linn Grove Dam (Buena Vista): Walleye fishing has slowed, but persistence and patience will be rewarded.

Black Hawk Lake (Sac): Crappie, yellow bass and bullhead fishing is good.

Storm Lake (Buena Vista): Anglers are catching some nice walleyes.

Clear Lake (Cerro Gordo): Yellow bass are being caught along the north shore using small jigs and minnows. Walleye fishing is good using jigs and minnows. Fish the east shore, Billy's Reef, Dodge's Point or the Island. Male walleye are being caught throughout the day but especially near sunset. Bullhead fishing is good using night crawlers on the bottom at sunset and into the early evening hours.

Beeds Lake (Franklin): Crappies are biting along the causeway and north shore jetties. Use small jigs and minnows. Most of the crappies are 7 to 9 inches.

For more information on fishing in northwest Iowa, call the regional office in Spirit Lake at 712-336-1840.

Southwest

Three Mile (Union): Channel catfish are being caught in the upper end on cut shad. Walleye fishing is good around the dam. Males are congregated around rocky structure along the dam attempting to spawn. Try using 1/16 to 1/8-ounce chartreuse or white jigs with or without a minnow. Fish can also be caught on shallow running crankbaits.

Twelve Mile (Union): Fishing is good for channel catfish in the upper end using cut shad. Walleye fishing is good around the dam in early morning hours. Males are congregated around rocky structure along the dam attempting to spawn. Try using 1/16 to 1/8-ounce chartreuse or white jigs with or without a minnow. Fish can also be caught on shallow running crankbaits. Crappies are good in the trees north of main boat ramp.

Icaria (Adams): Fishing is good for catfish at the east end using shad.

Binder (Adams): Largemouth bass fishing is good along the dam.

Big Creek (Polk): Crappies have been hitting in the Lost Lake area using jigs and minnows. Fishing has been slow in the main lake.

Lake Ahquabi (Warren): Crappie fishing has been slow with the best fishing early in the morning and late in the afternoon.

Don Williams (Boone): Crappie fishing is picking up, with some activity along the eastern part of the lake.

Rock Creek Lake (Jasper): Crappie fishing is fair to good using jigs and minnows. Most crappies are in the 6 to 8-inch range. Bullhead fishing has been good with fish over 1 pound being caught.

Red Rock (Marion): Crappies have been hitting on jigs and minnows in the bays.

Easter Lake (Polk): Crappie fishing has been good on jigs and minnows with fish up to 10 inches reported. A few walleye have also been caught, usually while crappie fishing.

Des Moines River (Polk): White bass have been hitting below the Scott Street Dam in Des Moines.

Saylorville tailwater (Polk): A few walleye have been hitting below Saylorville. Channel catfish have been hitting about anywhere along the river. Use shad for channel catfish.

Viking (Montgomery): Crappie fishing is fair using tube jigs around structure. Catfish are fair.

Cold Springs (Cass): Crappie fishing is fair using jigs/minnows around structure near shore.

Manawa (Pottawattamie): Walleye are spawning. Males are congregated along the south shore. Anglers are picking up a few bullheads and channel catfish. A few crappies are being caught in the lagoon.

Orient (Adair): Fishing is fair for 7-inch crappies using jigs and/or minnows along the dam. Catfishing is good.

Mormon Trail (Adair): Walleye fishing is fair around rocks along the dam.

Prairie Rose (Shelby): Fishing is good for 7-inch crappies on jigs/minnows around rocks and woody structure.

Farm Ponds: Crappies, bass and bluegills are being caught in shallow bays that warm quickly.

For more information on fishing in southwest Iowa, call the regional office in Lewis at 712-769-2587.

Southeast

Mississippi River Pools 16 to 19: Fishing has been fair. Water temperature is in the middle 50s and water levels are expected to gradually fall over the next week. Walleye and sauger fishing has been slow. Bluegill and crappie fishing has been fair on the backwater areas. Anglers are reportedly catching a few white bass on jigs and spinners. Catfishing continues to be fair.

Lake Odessa (Louisa): Catfish are working the shallow bays looking for shad that died during the winter. Try some fresh shad guts or cut bait for some nice catfish.

Lake Darling (Washington): Early season catfishing is good. Concentrate at the mouths of the feeder creeks right after a good rain. Catfish are feeding on the worms and other insects washed into the creeks. Minnows and night crawlers are the favorite baits.

Lake Belva Deer (Keokuk): The lake is still about four feet low. Your vehicle will get to stay on the ramp but not your trailer, which will be about four to five feet off the ramp for most boats.

Lake Rathbun (Appanoose): Channel catfish have been biting on shad and night crawlers. Fishing has been best where the wind is blowing in toward the shoreline. A few nice walleyes and a few crappies are also being caught.

Lake Sugema (Van Buren): Walleyes have been hitting on artificial lures fished around rocky shorelines and points. Bass can be caught on a pig and jig and other artificial lures in about 10 to 12-feet of water.

Lake Wapello (Davis): Crappies and a few bluegills are being caught in deeper water and around structure on plastic jigs. Bass are really biting on artificial lures.

Lake Macbride (Johnson): Crappie fishing is picking up throughout the lake on jigs and minnows. Anglers continue to catch largemouth bass. Walleye fishing has been fair off the dam. Anglers also report catching a few catfish on cut bait and night crawlers.

Coralville Reservoir (Johnson): Catfishing is starting to slow down. Anglers still caught fair numbers of catfish on dead shad and shad guts last week.

Iowa River (Johnson): Anglers continue to catch white bass and an occasional walleye below the Coralville and Burlington St. dams on jigs and minnows.

Wapsipinicon River (Jones and Linn): Fishing continues to be good for smallmouth bass and an occasional walleye on jigs and minnows. White bass fishing has been fair.

Farm Ponds: Fishing has been fair to good on farm ponds for bluegill, crappie and bass on live and artificial baits.

For more information on fishing in southeast Iowa, call the regional office in Brighton at 319-694-2430.

Northeast

Mississippi River Pools 9 to 15: The Mississippi River has fallen steadily over the past week and the gates are back in at Lock and Dam 10. River stage at L/D 10 peaked just below 608 feet and is expected to fall slowly over the next few days. Water temperature is 51 degrees at Guttenberg. Anglers are still catching a few walleye and sauger in the tailwaters of **Pools 10 and 11**. Bluegill and yellow perch fishing has been good below the boat ramp on the Iowa side of **L/D 10**. Walleye fishing is fair in **Pools 12 and 13**. Fish for walleyes in the tailwaters and along the side channels in areas with little current.

Turkey (Fayette and Clayton) and **Upper Iowa rivers** (Howard, Winneshiek and Allamakee): The redhorse sucker run is on! Suckers are hitting worms fished off the bottom.

Cedar River (Mitchell and Floyd): Walleye fishing is fair to good with jigs.

Cedar River (Bremer and Black Hawk): Walleye fishing is good on crankbaits or jigs tipped with a minnow or piece of night crawler. Fishing is good for channel catfish using dead minnows or cut baits.

Shell Rock River (Floyd, Butler, Bremer and Black Hawk): Walleye fishing is fair to good on crankbaits or jigs tipped with a minnow or piece of night crawler.

Maquoketa River (Delaware): Walleye fishing is good on jigs tipped with a minnow.

Lake Delhi (Delaware): White bass fishing is good on jigs and spinner baits. Bluegill fishing is fair on wax worms. Crappie fishing is fair on jigs tipped with a small minnow fished in the deeper water.

Alice Wyth, Big Woods, George Wyth and South Prairie lakes (Black Hawk): Crappie fishing is fair. For best success, fish along the shoreline on sunny, bright days using jigs or jigs tipped with a minnow.

Trout fishing is excellent! **Paint Creek** in Allamakee County offers excellent angling opportunities with long stretches of stream open to public fishing. Located upstream of Yellow River State Forest near the town of Waterville, Paint Creek had a pre-stocking season trout population of more than 500 fish per mile. Sections of this stream have recently been posted with white public fishing signs identifying the privately owned areas open to public fishing.

Bear Creek, in Fayette County, offers great fishing opportunities for the adventurous angler. Bear Creek is located three miles southwest of Wadena off County Road C24 and requires the angler to hike down into a beautiful, remote valley. Bear Creek is not stocked during the heat of the summer, so plan a trip to this beautiful stream in the near future. For current trout stocking information on these and other northeast Iowa trout streams, call the trout stocking hotline at 563-927-5736. You can also access the trout stocking calendar through the internet at www.iowadnr.com and go to the fish and fishing web pages.

For information on fishing in northeast Iowa, call the regional office in Manchester at 563-927-3276.

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