

Iowa Outdoors

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

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[Electronic photos available upon request]

NEW MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES PROVIDE HOPE FOR IOWA LAKES

By Lowell Washburn

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

Once the shimmering blue jewels of pristine prairie landscapes, Iowa’s shallow natural lakes have been used, abused, and horribly degraded. Transparent waters have become clouded by silt and laden with algae. Native fish have been largely replaced by destructive invasive bottom feeders, such as carp. Valued aquatic plant communities have been eradicated while the abundant and diverse wildlife populations they once harbored have been severely reduced in number or, in the case of several species, have vanished altogether.

But all is not lost. Help is on the way. In northwest Iowa’s Dickinson County, scientists have joined forces to implement a large scale and aggressive management plan aimed at returning natural lakes to their former glory. Diamond Lake currently represents one of four showcase examples of how Iowa lakes are responding to the radical new management. Following a full, water level draw down two summers ago, Diamond Lake is being allowed to slowly refill. On Monday, plant experts, fish researchers, and wildlife biologists toured the area for an assessment of the lake’s biological progress. They were not disappointed.

“It’s really hard to believe that this lake has just been pea soup green for the past 80 years,” said DNR District Fisheries Biologist, Mike Hawkins as he waded into the

shallow, crystal clear waters of Diamond Lake to catalog newly emerging aquatic plant life. “Today, the water is so absolutely clear, so transparent that you can see every single detail of what’s on the bottom. We’re seeing a very strong vegetative response and wildlife is increasing. Birdlife is everywhere.”

The statement was no exaggeration. Lush growths of bulrush, arrowhead, burr reed, and cattail stretched from the shoreline to the very edge of the lake’s open water center. Sedge wrens, rails, yellow-headed blackbirds, and other marsh birds called from among the vertical threads of the living green curtain. From beneath the water, the pearly lining of an empty clam shell reflected the afternoon sunlight with signal mirror clarity. As the scientific entourage advanced, scores of marsh creatures --- tadpoles, water boatman, dragonflies, and leopard frogs by the hundreds --- scurried for cover.

“So far, we’ve been able to initiate enhancement projects on four shallow lakes here in northwest Iowa,” said DNR Wildlife Supervisor, Mark Gulick. “The response on all four areas has been extremely encouraging and, based on these results, we’re hoping that public interest for shallow lake enhancement will spread across the state.”

“We take each lake case by case, and strive to restore the system to what it was historically. For example, if a certain lake had documented native fish populations, then we incorporate that into the plan. Likewise, if an area didn’t have fish then we don’t try to turn the lake into something it’s not,” said Gulick.

“Of the four shallow lakes projects we’ve implemented so far, Diamond Lake is the only one that had a historic fishery and we’re trying to restore that biological component,” says Hawkins. “This summer, we stocked the lake with 80,000 fingerling perch. Next year, we’ll be adding fingerling northern pike to the area.”

“What we’re basically seeing here is the equivalent of taking the ‘Dead Sea’ and turning it into a viable, living resource,” says Gary Phillips, an aquatic plant specialist, environmental studies coordinator for the Iowa Lakes Community College, and water level management advisor for shallow lakes restorations.

“Due to an abundance of newly established aquatic plant growth, Diamond Lake insect populations have exploded,” said Phillips. The benefits of those desirable insect populations to fish growth cannot be overstated, he added.

“I’ve seen firsthand examples where [following a natural drought] lakes refilled and anglers were catching foot-long perch hand over fist and not keeping anything smaller. Those aren’t just jumbo perch ---- those are super jumbos,” remarked Phillips. “Based on what I’m seeing here today, I think you’re certain to see phenomenal fish growth at Diamond Lake and there will certainly be a significant increase in the number of ducks and geese being seen by waterfowl hunters.”

“Each area has a unique personality, but regardless of which shallow lake you look at, the central theme remains the same,” notes Gulick. “What we’re essentially trying to do is restore health to a set of highly degraded natural systems. If there is one constant in all of this, it’s that water quality improvement is the driving force behind each and every project. Water quality enhancement is always a noble cause. Regardless of other interests, water quality is something that affects everyone.”

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BANDING WILD IOWA OSPREYS

Young ospreys will be banded at Don Williams Lake at 10 a.m., on July 7, and at Duane Arnold Facility at 10 a.m., on July 9. Participants that wish to view the Duane Arnold banding will need to make arrangements with Renee Nelson at 319-851-7140. Duane Arnold is a secure atomic energy facility.

There are 14 osprey nests in Iowa this year. Sites that were the first to release ospreys at Macbride Raptor Project and Hartman Reserve Nature Center each have four nesting pairs. The Polk County Conservation Board reports two nests near their release site at Jester Park, and one nest at Don Williams Lake, Duane Arnold Power Plant, Lake Rathbun, and the Missouri River in Woodbury County.

Twenty, 42-day-old ospreys will be placed at four sites around Iowa July 13- 17. There are biological and climatic challenges that work of this kind require, but having highly competent and qualified wildlife professionals and wildlife rehabilitators at each site makes for a smoother transition for these young birds.

Volunteers may contact coordinators at each “hack” or release site to assist in these efforts to bring ospreys to Iowa. Financial support is especially appreciated at each site as no tax dollars or DNR Wildlife Diversity funds are budgeted for this project. Contacts for each respective site are: White Rock Conservancy, Kay Neumann at 712-683-5555; Spirit Lake, Barb Tagami at 712-330-1080; Dubuque, Brian Pearson at 563-556-6745; and new site this year in Warren County, Missy Smith at 515-961-6169.

The young ospreys are developed enough to tear apart their favorite food, fish, by themselves. They will be attaining flight status about 53 days of age and allowed to fly freely from their “hack” or release site. Where the birds learn to fly and fish on their own becomes their “home” where survivors return to nest at four or five years of age. Volunteers and wildlife professionals at five sites have geared up to fill the niche the osprey adults were providing their young with fish and security. In conjunction with feeding the birds, the young ospreys are monitored daily to ensure they will be flight ready.

There have been 209 ospreys released at 10 sites since 1997. Ospreys have successfully nested in Iowa since 2003 with 28 young produced from 14 successful nestings. In 2008 three osprey young were relocated from Jester Park nest before it was swamped by flood waters in June. Those young were delivered to Kay Neumann with Saving Our Avian Resources and two were released from White Rock Conservancy site in July 2008.

All Iowa ospreys have a purple band with number and letter on right leg and silver USFWS band on left leg. The wild-produced ospreys from Iowa have a green USFWS band.

Banding at other sites will be announced later.

**For further information contact Pat Schlarbaum at 515-432-2823 or 712-330-0526
Website connections will be up and running when birds arrive have been
established at http://www.iowadnr.gov/parks/state_park_list/elk_rock.html**

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ROAD REPLACEMENT BEGINS AT HONEY CREEK STATE PARK

MORAVIA - The Iowa Department of Natural Resources has begun to replace the seven miles of roads that wind through the original Honey Creek State Park. The construction will not impact any traffic or activities at nearby Honey Creek Resort State Park.

The first of stage of construction began on July 1 when the road leading to shelter 1 and the road leading to the north boat ramp was closed. The road to the campground and the main boat ramp remains open until Aug. 3, when the second stage closes the road to the campground as well as shelters 2, 3 and 4. Honey Creek State Park campgrounds will also be closed for the season on Aug. 3. There will be no camping allowed for Labor Day weekend.

The main boat ramp will remain open until Sept. 9 when final stretch of park road is closed.

The new road will have bike lanes on each side running through much of the park. Work is expected to be done in time for the park to re-open on April 1, weather permitting.

The \$3.7 million project is funding by the Iowa Department of Transportation Park and Institutional Road funds.

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MAGAZINE INCORRECTLY LISTS IOWA PANFISH LIMITS

DES MOINES – An article in the current edition of *Iowa Fish and Game* magazine incorrectly states that Iowa's inland daily bag limit for bluegills and for crappies is 15 fish each. The correct daily bag limit for inland water is 25 fish each.

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CORRECTION TO EARLY MUZZLELOADER DEER SEASON

Des Moines – The early muzzleloader deer season in Iowa is Oct. 17 to 25. The season dates were listed incorrectly on the 2009 *Iowa Outdoors* calendar.

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DNR AMERICORPS MEMBERS TO RECEIVE GOVERNOR'S VOLUNTEER AWARD

DES MOINES — Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) AmeriCorps members have been selected to receive a 2009 Governor's Volunteer Award for the outstanding contribution of volunteer services to the community.

During the natural disasters in 2008, including the tornado that tore through Parkersburg, and the extensive flooding throughout the state, last year's DNR AmeriCorps members were called into service to aid ailing communities.

"I am proud of the leadership and commitment demonstrated by our members during those difficult times. Those members promptly responded to the needs of Iowans, while the current members continue to help put back the pieces," said Jane Mild, supervisor of the Office of Volunteer Service within the DNR.

A special recognition ceremony is planned for Monday, July 27 at 2 p.m. in the Southeast Polk High School auditorium with a reception to follow.

"The devotion of volunteers like you help Iowa consistently remain in the top 10 states in the nation for its volunteerism rate," said Iowa Governor Chet Culver.

AmeriCorps is the national service program that provides thousands of Americans of all ages and backgrounds with education awards in exchange for three months to one year of community service.

The DNR coordinates three AmeriCorps programs to further conserve and enhance Iowa's natural resources in cooperation with individuals and organizations. They are the Green Iowa Energy Unit; Keepers of the Land Volunteer Program; and Recovery AmeriCorps.

For more information, contact Karen Schechinger at (515) 281-0878 or at karen.schechinger@dnr.iowa.gov.

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