



# IOWA OUTDOORS

## IOWA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

CONSERVATION AND RECREATION DIVISION | [WWW.IOWADNR.GOV/NEWS/](http://WWW.IOWADNR.GOV/NEWS/)

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: JULY 21, 2009

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### **NEW MISSOURI BACKWATER NEARING COMPLETION**

MISSOURI VALLEY, Iowa – A \$3 million project to restore historic backwaters and side channels to the Missouri River is nearing completion at the Tyson Bend Wildlife Area that will create about 30 acres of critically needed backwaters.

The new 30 acre backwater will have a depth up to 10 feet and a large area of shallow water that will serve as a fish nursery.

“We certainly hope to see benefits to both fish and wildlife from projects like this,” said Van Sterner, fisheries biologist for the Iowa Department of Natural Resources at Onawa. He said bluegill, crappie, bass, catfishes, buffalo, paddlefish, waterfowl, shorebirds should all benefit from the backwater habitat.

The river itself has been altered in a number of ways from its original form over the years. When the Missouri River was channelized, an estimated 100,000 acres of critical backwaters and side channels were lost between Sioux City and St. Louis.

Before dams were placed on the Missouri River, the sediment load measured at Sioux City was 142 million tons per year. Sediment was historically critical to aquatic life in the Missouri. After dams were installed, the sediment load dropped to 4 million tons per year.

The river system had become sediment starved and the newly channelized river was eliminating backwaters and side channels.

Of the 67 native fish species in the Missouri River, 51 are listed as rare, uncommon or decreasing in all or part of their range.

The Tyson Bend project is one step toward improving the aquatic resources of the Missouri River.

A dredge is removing 1 million cubic yards of sediment creating the backwater area and pumping it into the river, which goes against nearly every piece of water quality improvement discussions in Iowa, but is critical to improving the health of the Missouri River. The plan is to allow the river current to deposit the dredge spoil which will create sandbars and aquatic habitat.

The dredging portion of the project is expected to be finished by the middle of August.

"This is a great project but we need a lot more of this kind of thing if we are going to make a difference over here," said Sterner.

Recreating critical backwater habitat is a partnership between the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Iowa Department of Natural Resources who have been working on similar joint projects on the Missouri River since 1986, when Congress instructed the Corps to restore 25 percent of the terrestrial and aquatic habitat that was lost when the river was channeled. The Iowa DNR identifies land along the river that it currently owns, submits a list of goals and objectives it would like to achieve and works with the Corps to construct the project.

"We feel it's a good partnership that is adding or improving habitat for fish, wildlife, and recreation opportunity," said Doug Chafa, wildlife biologist for the DNR for the Missouri River Wildlife Unit. The potential is almost unlimited for improving recreation on and along the river, he said.

While the landscape of Tyson Bend has been changed, the access will remain the same. Hunters can continue to use the road to access the area and pursue deer at Tyson Bend. The low water crossing will remain in tact. "The public can still hunt and fish the area," said Chafa.

**Media Contact: Doug Chafa, wildlife biologist, Missouri River Unit, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 712-420-2437 or Van Sterner, fisheries biologist, Missouri River, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, at 712-433-4706**

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**FISH FROM THREE IOWA LAKES EXCEED MERCURY ADVISORY LEVEL**

DES MOINES – The Iowa Department of Natural Resources has confirmed the presence of mercury above consumption advisory levels in tissue samples from largemouth bass collected from Red Haw Lake in Lucas County, Upper Centerville Reservoir in Appanoose County, and Grade Lake in Clarke County.

Individuals should consume no more than one meal per week of largemouth bass caught from these three lakes.

Every year Iowa DNR biologists collect samples of fish for laboratory analysis to determine the wholesomeness of fish for human consumption. Edible portions of these fish are analyzed by a certified lab and results are compared to consumption advisory levels as identified by the DNR and Iowa Department of Public Health in the state's consumption advisory protocol. The risk-based protocol went into effect in 2006 and is based on US EPA and FDA guidance. This protocol is the basis for issuing consumption advisories for Iowa waters.

This brings the total number of advisories in Iowa to 14. All of Iowa's consumption advisories recommend that individuals should consume no more than one meal per week of the fish species of concern.

Previous advisories issued for Iowa lakes include Cedar Lake in Cedar Rapids for common carp and channel catfish, and Cedar Bend Lake for common carp in Linn County for PCBs. Advisories due to mercury have previously been issued for largemouth bass at Lake Geode in Henry County, Morman Trail Lake in Adair County, Nine Eagles Lake in Decatur County, and North Banner and South Banner lakes near Indianola,.

Other advisories in Iowa rivers have previously been issued for mercury include the Cedar River from Floyd County north to the Minnesota border for smallmouth bass, walleye and northern pike; the Upper Iowa River from the lower dam in eastern Winneshiek County upstream 24 miles for any species of fish; and the Volga River, including the Little Volga and the North Branch Volga River from the town of Volga upstream in Clayton County for smallmouth bass.

Mississippi River Pool 12, which is the area between Lock and Dam 11 in Dubuque and Lock and Dam 12 at Bellevue in Jackson County, has a consumption advisory for walleye, sauger, largemouth bass, smallmouth bass, white bass and northern pike.

The DNR has information on these contaminants and consumption advisories on its Fish and Fishing webpage at [www.iowadnr.gov/fish/index.html](http://www.iowadnr.gov/fish/index.html) then click on Fish Consumption Advisories in the navigation bar on the left.

Fish are still part of a healthy diet. To achieve the most health benefits – which also include proper growth and brain development in children – the Iowa Department of Public Health recommends that Iowans of all ages should eat fish at least twice per week. This includes fish you buy or catch yourself. For information on the benefits of eating fish or what types of fish are safe to eat, visit the Iowa Department of Public Health's webpage at [http://www.idph.state.ia.us/eh/common/pdf/env/fish\\_health\\_issues.pdf](http://www.idph.state.ia.us/eh/common/pdf/env/fish_health_issues.pdf)

**For more information, contact Joe Larscheid, chief of fisheries, at 515-281-5208 or Stu Schmitz, state toxicologist with the Iowa Department of Public Health, at 515- 281-8707.**

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## HONEY CREEK RESORT GEARS UP FOR RAGBRAI

MORAVIA – This Thursday, Honey Creek Resort State Park will greet its largest group of visitors yet. The resort is smack dab in the middle of Day 5 of the Register’s Annual Great Bike Ride Across Iowa, better known as RAGBRAI.

“We have the potential for thousands of visitors in a very short period of time and we are gearing up for it, no pun intended,” says Jeremie Slagle, resort manager. A two-acre area at the entrance to the resort will be set up with tents, bales, grills, refrigerated trucks and music -- all ready to welcome the estimated 10,000 riders that will travel by the resort.

“We will have a wide variety of food and drinks,” says Slagle, “featuring a couple of favorites from the resort’s menu -- Uptown Mac & Cheese, and Peach and Apple Tartlets with cinnamon ice cream. We’ll also have veggie wraps, turkey wraps and standard RAGBRAI fare from the grill – burgers, brats and chicken sandwiches. Raccoon River Brewery, Tassel Ridge Winery, Johnsonville and Miller/Coors are all partnering with us to provide quality food and beverages to the riders.”

Clean portable potties, free water and a water drive-through – all popular features for RAGBRAI riders – will be waiting at the resort.

A local cover band from Knoxville, Nine-Mile North, will provide live music.

A shuttle will be available for bikers who would like see more of the resort without having to ride the two miles to the lodge. “People are welcome to ride down, take a look our beautiful lodge, restaurant, golf course, cabins or take a walk on our trails,” says Slagle.

Thursday also includes the century loop of the week-long bike ride, giving riders the opportunity to add enough extra miles to total 100 for the day. Honey Creek Resort is on the loop which means some folks will be going past the resort twice.

“Whether folks are waiting for friends to complete the century loop or just looking for a break along the route, Honey Creek Resort is going to be a perfect stop,” says Slagle.

For more information about Honey Creek Resort State Park, visit [www.HoneyCreekResort.com](http://www.HoneyCreekResort.com) or call 877-677-3344. For more information about RAGBRAI, visit their official web site at <http://ragbrai.com/>

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## ANNUAL UPLAND GAME SURVEY BEGINS

The Iowa DNR's annual survey of upland game populations will soon be under way with state biologists and conservation officers driving more than 200, 30-mile roadside routes across the state.

The August Roadside Survey, as it is called, takes place between August 1 and 15 each year and is the DNR's main tool for determining if the fall populations will be up or down from the previous year, said Todd Bogenschutz, upland wildlife research biologist for the DNR.

Routes start at sunrise on mornings with heavy dew and are driven primarily on gravel roads because of the lower traffic. A heavy dew causes hens to move their broods to the gravel roadsides to dry off before feeding, allowing them to be counted easily. Routes are driven over the same roads each year so that the information is comparable with previous years.

According to Bogenschutz, this survey is the best indicator of what hunters will find when they take to the field this fall.

"Historically, when the roadside counts are compared to the small game harvest figures, they parallel each other nicely," he said.

However, since the survey depends on heavy dew for consistent results, hot dry weather in August can affect the results. "The birds do not come to the roads as consistently in dry years," says Bogenschutz, "which makes the counts more variable".

Final results of the survey will be compiled in late August and will be posted on the DNR's website in early September. To find out more information visit <http://www.iowadnr.gov/wildlife/files/upindex.html>

To sign up for e-mail notification when the 2009 roadside results have been posted visit <http://www.iowadnr.gov/wildlife/app/roadside/>

**Media Contact: Todd Bogenschutz, upland wildlife research biologist, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 515-432-2823.**

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## **A LAKE REBORN**

By Joe Wilkinson

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

A mid-summer day at the lake? There's the beach, canoeing, camping...maybe poking around a few fishing hotspots from the boat. Hard to beat in Iowa...or anywhere for that matter.

It's a much different picture this season at Lake Darling State Park. Stake bed skeletons and other fish habitat stick out from the mudflats and the little bit of water in the basin. Still, the promise of what is to come makes it worth the wait.

The effort—some of it completed, some yet to come—is a testament to cooperation; between adjoining landowners, between landowners and the park, and within the Brighton community itself, recognizing the regional economic and recreational draw. Just as importantly, coordinators say the plan—in large part—can be duplicated across Iowa. That’s important, in a state with dozens of human-built ‘middle aged’ lakes which have hit 50, 60 and 70 years of age.

Just the lake reconstruction itself is huge in the state park, located an hour south of Iowa City where Washington, Keokuk and Jefferson counties meet. An extended dam and spillway system will replace the cracked, aging structure that impounded 302 acres of water when the park opened in 1950. Sediment washing in from the 12,500 acre watershed has reduced that to 267 acres now.

Dredging will peel back a thick, smothering blanket of silt. “Back in the ‘campground’ arm of the lake; you see reed canary grass (in the old lake bed). About 50,000 cubic yards of sediment will come out of that area of the lake,” notes Department of Natural Resources fisheries biologist Chad Dolan, standing between two of the work areas. “Move forward here (near the boat ramp/island area) with all this exposed sediment, another 140,000 cubic yards will be removed.”

But just removing sediment isn’t worth the considerable trouble...and expense...if decades of future fill float back in. That’s the ‘unique cooperation’ part that puts a smile on the face of Stan Simmons, who heads up the watershed project, a group effort between the DNR, the Washington County Soil and Water Conservation district and other agencies like the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship and USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, and of course, landowners. “Private landowners own 90 percent of the draining area,” underscored Simmons, as he guided a bus tour of the watershed, explaining the project to Iowa Natural Resource Commissioners, and others involved with the project. “It was only through their cooperation and willingness that we get the land treatment that was so needed to take care of the sedimentation and other (water quality) problems.”

At one stop, Simmons points to a sloping field with a deep creek carving through it. When cattle were pastured there, debris and manure just flushed across Highway 71 into the park and, eventually, the lake. Now, the owner keeps cattle out and cuts the hay. The runoff issue is settled. On the other side of the gravel, a four acre pond lets silt from the adjoining 400 acres settle out, a mile from the lake. Same landowner, but here, Washington County agreed to build up the gravel road. A dam was created and the line of sight to the highway was improved. “A mutual benefit,” pronounced Simmons; a term used repeatedly on the tour.

North on the county blacktop, Simmons points to what he calls his ‘pride and joy.’ “This 22-acre pond drains 1,200 acres; 10 percent of all the water flowing to the lake,” he announces. “It took the cooperation of five different landowners.” At each stop, there’s a similar story; landowner opts for a pond, rather than grass waterway strips...maybe a CRP contract here...tile outlet terraces here...road culvert risers there. Several new homes show a little rural economic development, too.

Each ‘treatment’ helps keep silt out of the lake. They slow the movement of water, allowing sediment and nutrients (primarily excess nitrogen and phosphorus) to settle out.

They basically filter that water as it makes its way toward the lake basin," says Dolan. "You get a much cleaner lake. It benefits (more desirable) sight feeding fish. Their growth is accelerated."

That fishing attracts anglers. The expanded beach and cleaner water attract other park goers. The spacious, year-old four season lodge – built on the fundraising efforts of the Friends of Lake Darling - attracts everything from family reunions to weddings. It all means money in the pockets of area businesses...and a focal point for residents, and former residents who come back to the Brighton area.

And, while the rolling topography presents local challenges and benefits, the message throughout the up close view of the watershed was that the mix of private and government involvement could be repeated across Iowa; with Simmons stressing, though; "without landowner cooperation, you won't get anything done."

## **Lake Darling Project**

### Outside the park:

12,500 acre watershed

71 different landowners

151 private land construction projects

Cost; \$1,495,000; \$1,072,000 cost share funding

31 private ponds

CRP signup, and continues

Many other 'treatments' before this project

### Inside state park:

Reconstructed, expanded dam and spillway

Construction June '10, done June '11

11 erosion control ponds, 20 more coming

8 road culvert risers

300,000 cubic yards of dredging coming

6,300 tons of rock to 'armor banks'

\$4.7 million investment

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[Electronic photo available upon request]

## **YELLOW BASS ACTION CONTINUES AT CLEAR LAKE**

By Lowell Washburn

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

CLEAR LAKE---As we move into late summer fishing, Clear Lake yellow bass continue to provide plenty of angling action. So much so, in fact, that anglers from across the region, and in some cases from across the state, are still traveling here to cash in on the recreational bonanza.

Although the pace has definitely slowed from the frenzied action and fish-basket-busting catches that had anglers flailing the waters during April and May, most outings are still yielding double digit catches that are enough to provide a good meal or three.

Locations and tactics have changed since spring. Schools have moved deeper. Instead of finding huge numbers of fish hugging rocky shorelines in two feet of water, most yellows have moved to 10 or 12 feet where they scour the bottom for protein rich invertebrates, such as blood worms. There are still exceptions, such as when a school suddenly decides to come in and explore rock reefs, the edge of the rush beds, or make quick forays into shallow, sandy beach areas. The simple key to success, say anglers, is not waste time fishing where there aren't any fish. If you hit a spot and don't start catching fish within five or 10 minutes, pick up and move on. Be aggressive and be mobile. Don't wait for the schools to find you.

Terry Matney, of Liscomb, is good example of hitting the jackpot. While fishing Clear Lake on Monday, he stayed completely mobile by drift fishing near the Island using "just a worm and a hook" in about 10 feet of water.

"This was my very first trip to Clear Lake. I'd heard the stories, but I really didn't expect to catch this many," said Matney. "I'd also heard yellow bass are really tasty -- as good or better to eat than walleye. I guess I'm going to find out now. I definitely plan on coming back."

Short lived and prolific to the point of being considered a nuisance species in many Iowa waters, especially in southern Iowa, DNR fisheries biologists note that yellow bass are one fish that anglers never have to feel bad about 'catching and keeping.' The more fish anglers harvest from a population, the better the growth rate for survivors.

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## **LOWER MORSE LAKE GRASSLANDS BIRD CONSERVATION AREA DEDICATION**

CLARION - A ceremony to dedicate the Lower Morse Lake Grassland Complex as Iowa's newest Bird Conservation Area (BCA) will take place at 1:30 p.m., August 6. The event will be held at the shelter on the northwest corner of Lake Cornelia State Park, located about four miles northeast of Clarion.

The Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is hosting the dedication that will include brief presentations and the unveiling of a special Bird Conservation Area sign. After

the ceremony, several trumpeter swans will be released into the wild, followed by a short driving tour of the area.

The Lower Morse Lake area is one of Iowa's most important grassland/wetland complexes. "Designating this complex as a Bird Conservation Area will add to its recognition by indicating its importance for nesting and migratory grassland and wetland birds," said Bruce Ehresman, DNR wildlife diversity program biologist. "This area provides important nesting habitat for declining grassland birds, such as bobolink, Henslow's sparrow, and sedge wren; for declining wetland species like American bittern, black and Forster's terns, and Ruddy ducks; plus the area provides nesting and migration stopover habitat for many other bird species suffering nationwide declines."

"Creating Bird Conservation Areas in Iowa is a priority for Iowa DNR and is part of a larger international effort promoting assistance for all birds with the greatest conservation need," said Doug Harr, DNR's state program coordinator for wildlife diversity. "The BCA program encourages habitat conservation at a large landscape level in order to re-establish stable or growing bird populations. Each BCA includes a combination of well-managed public and private lands, and since the program is non-regulatory, private landowners participate only if they wish."

"The designation of the lower Morse Lake Grasslands Bird Conservation Area serves as recognition of the excellent teamwork of many partners, cooperating to emphasize the importance of habitat for all birds. State, federal, and county conservation agencies, working together with private conservation organizations and citizens have made this possible," said Greg Hanson, DNR wildlife biologist and Clear Lake Wildlife Unit manager.

Bird watching is among the nation's fastest-growing outdoor activities, and bird watching along with general wildlife watching is a \$304 million industry in Iowa. "It is anticipated that this new BCA will attract bird enthusiasts from throughout the region," Harr said. "This increased activity by birders should promote growth of the local tourism economy and encourage investment in local bird conservation."

The event is open to the public. Bird conservationists and wetland appreciators alike are asked to help celebrate the dedication of this very important Bird Conservation Area.

**For more information, contact Ehresman at (515) 432-2823, Harr at (515) 281-4815, or Hanson at (641) 829-3285.**

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**FOLLOW OSPREY ON THE WEB**

Volunteers and county conservation board members placed 10 ospreys from Minnesota and Wisconsin at Spirit Lake, Dubuque, the Annett Nature Center in Warren County, and White Rock Conservancy, near Coon Rapids, last week.

Webcams at websites at <http://www.dubuquecounty.org> and <http://www.warrenccb.org> have been established to view birds.

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## **WATER SAFETY CHALLENGE AT SAYLORVILLE LAKE**

A Water Safety Challenge is planned for 1 to 3 p.m., July 25, at the Sandpiper Beach on Saylorville Lake.

Join Bobber, the Water Safety Dog, the Iowa Department of Natural Resources, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary for a fun-filled day at the beach. Participate in free interactive games to earn a free t-shirt.

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## **RAGBRAI'S LANDSCAPE UNCOVERED...**

RAGBRAI enthusiasts can find out what makes up the landscape of the 2009 Register's Annual Great Bike Ride across Iowa with the "Learn about the Land" 7-day set of RAGBRAI brochures. This joint project between the Iowa Department of Natural Resources and U.S. Geological Survey highlights the land, history, rivers, and other natural resources that cyclists will cross this month.

The 2009 route stays almost exclusively in the hills of southern Iowa. In addition to describing the origin and extent of southern Iowa's rolling topography, the 2009 "Learn about the Land" brochures highlight Iowa's oil exploration, geodes, and rich coal mining history.

Maps and cross sections included in the 7-day series will help participants locate nearby parks, cities, and landmarks...and plan for each day's many hills.

To view, download, and print copies of the 2009 "Learn about the Land" RAGBRAI brochures, please visit: [www.igsb.uiowa.edu](http://www.igsb.uiowa.edu) or <http://ia.water.usgs.gov>. U.S. Geological Survey staff will be handing out sets of brochures at campgrounds along the bike route, and the Natural Resources Conservation Service will also have copies at their booths during the ride.

**Contact:** Chad Fields, DNR, at (319) 335-2083 or [Chad.Fields@dnr.iowa.gov](mailto:Chad.Fields@dnr.iowa.gov), or Kaylene Carney, U.S. Geological Survey, at (319) 430-2985 (cell) or [kfcarney@usgs.gov](mailto:kfcarney@usgs.gov).

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