

Iowa Outdoors

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

www.iowadnr.gov

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MAINTAINING PARKS A CHALLENGE AMID STAFF SHORTAGE

OSKALOOSA, Iowa – Pulling into the campground, they are fairly easy to spot. The campground regulars.

Each Iowa state park has its own. They camp together each weekend, usually at the same campsites. They know the staff by name, if the fish are biting and on what. They also notice if the shower building is not clean or if the fire rings are not being emptied of its ash.

Iowa's state parks host nearly 700,000 campers and more than 14 million visitors each year. Most are not regulars, but are Iowans looking to get back in touch with the outdoors and when they take the time and effort to come to a park, they would like it to be in prime condition.

When there are 700,000 pairs of eyes critiquing the condition of Iowa's state parks, there is no place to hide.

State parks are cared for by seasonal staff working along side the fulltime park ranger or manager. In a typical summer, 250 to 300 summer seasonal employees work 180,000 hours cleaning, mowing and doing minor repairs.

In 2009, there will be 143 summer seasonal employees working for 74,000 hours doing the same tasks.

“We just don’t have the bodies in the parks that we have in the past so it will likely be a little longer between restroom cleanings and a little longer between mowing,” said Kevin Szcodronski, chief of state parks for the Iowa Department of Natural Resources. “We are not making excuses. All we are asking for is some patience and understanding.”

Szcodronski said they are taking this opportunity to review each individual park management plan by looking for possible areas where prairies and woodlands may be installed that would improve water quality and offer nesting to songbirds and other wildlife. By converting part of the park to prairie or woodland, staff would reduce the amount of grounds that needed mowing.

He also said his staff is asking campers to clean up after themselves and to help conserve energy and water while camping. In 2008, state parks paid nearly \$800,000 in utilities. That’s a big light bill that can take a bite out of any budget, let alone a budget that has \$1.25 million less in it than the previous year.

More than half of the budget for state parks comes from the state general fund which is made up of state income tax dollars. Iowa income tax dollars are down due to a significant national recession affecting jobs and individual spending. When state tax receipts are down, the services provided by those receipts are also impacted.

The rest of the parks budget comes from camping receipts, lodge and cabin rentals.

“I’m sure we don’t hear all the complaints in the Des Moines office, but we made it through one of our busiest holiday weekends of the year with a handful of complaints and we are looking at each one to see if there is something we can do to address it,” he said. “We are not making excuses but we want our campers and picnickers to understand where we are staff-wise. If they have complaints, I would like to hear them because even in our current staff situation, we still strive to offer a quality outdoor experience.”

Szcodronski said he is hearing campers’ question that Honey Creek Resort is the reason for the condition of the rest of the parks. This is simply not the case, he said.

“Honey Creek Resort is paid for by special appropriations and by bonds, not from the budget we work from for the rest of the parks. It’s comparing apples to oranges. The two are not connected,” he said.

Iowa law spells out that state parks use certain money for park operations, including maintenance, and certain money for construction projects in parks and not for operations.

“We will have some construction going on in our parks this year, like the Green Valley campground renovation, that may give the appearance that we have money to build new facilities, but not maintain our existing campgrounds. It’s confusing, but each pot of money that makes up the budget has certain strings to it that can only be used for certain things,” Szcodronski said.

“We are making due with what we have and cutting back in areas where we can,” he said. “What you will not see in Iowa that is happening in other states is that we will not be closing any parks.”

Park users wanting to help should contact the manager or ranger to see what volunteer duties are available. Mowing and cleaning are two prominent needs, but there may be other priorities within certain parks, such as trail and park grounds maintenance.

And while coping with the economic downturn has been challenging to state parks here, Iowa is not alone in having to cope with budget cuts, said Szcodronski.

“Some states are doing a little better than we are, but there are some states that are in far worse shape,” Szcodronski said, pointing to a recent announcement in California that 220 state parks there could close after July 1 due to budget cuts.

“We are committed to keeping the parks open and making every effort to make each visit as enjoyable of an experience as we can during these tough economic times,” Szcodronski said.

Media Contact: Kevin Szcodronski, chief, State Parks Bureau, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 515-281-8674.

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IOWA RESIDENTS ENJOY FREE FISHING DAYS JUNE 5, 6 AND 7

DES MOINES - Iowa residents may fish for free on June 5, 6 and 7, when the Iowa Department of Natural Resources waives the requirement that anglers possess a valid fishing license while fishing. The free fishing weekend is for Iowa residents only and all other fishing laws are in effect.

“This first weekend in June is typically a great time to fish. Fish are usually close to shore and are willing to bite. It’s a great time to take children fishing or to introduce someone new to fishing,” said Joe Larscheid, chief of the Iowa Department of Natural Resources fisheries bureau.

Fishing is an activity that can be done during any stage in life and is a great way to spend time together as a family.

“We want people to fish because it is a good, wholesome activity,” Larscheid said. “If someone needs a little instruction, there are fun, hands-on fishing clinics available to teach parents or kids the basics of fishing.”

A list of fishing clinics, derbies, and other fun events co-sponsored by the DNR is available at <http://www.iowadnr.gov/education/files/clinic.pdf>

Media Contact: Joe Larscheid, chief, fisheries bureau, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 515-281-5208.

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BREEDING BIRD ATLAS BLOCKBUSTING WEEKENDS

The Iowa Ornithologists’ Union and the Iowa Department of Natural Resources will be hosting three Breeding Bird Atlas (BBA) Blockbusting Weekends in and around state parks this summer.

The BBA is a five year project where volunteers search for evidence of bird nesting throughout the state to determine bird distributions and how bird species are doing in Iowa. The first BBA Weekend will be held at Viking Lake State Park in Montgomery County, on June 5-7; then in the Great Lakes Area, Dickinson County, on June 26-28; and finally at Backbone State Park, Delaware County, on July 17-19.

Everyone is invited to participate, regardless of previous birding experience. Each weekend will begin with a presentation providing information for first time atlas volunteers (how to participate, how to determine breeding status, how to turn in observations) at 7 p.m. Friday night at the state park. A sign-in table will be available throughout the weekend for atlas volunteers to come and go as needed.

Saturday, volunteers will be out in blocks searching for nesting birds. Sunday at 3 p.m. in the park, there will be a grand compilation of information collected on birds during the weekend.

Atlas volunteers are encouraged to visit any blocks within a reasonable driving distance from the state park. Volunteers are responsible for making arrangements for their own accommodations and meals.

If you plan on participating, please RSVP to the BBA Coordinator the Monday prior to the weekend. For more specific information, please visit <http://bba.iowabirds.org/Default.aspx> or contact Nicki Nagl, the BBA volunteer coordinator at bbacoordinator@iowabirds.org or 515-432-2823 ext. 117.

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DNR BANDING DES MOINES PEREGRINE FALCONS 11 A.M. JUNE 3

DES MOINES – The Iowa Department of Natural Resources will be banding peregrine falcons at the American Republic Insurance building at 11 a.m., on June 3. The banding will take place in the courtyard area. American Republic Insurance building is located at 601 6th Ave., in downtown Des Moines.

The young peregrines have matured to their third week and weigh between 500 and 750 grams. With birds of prey, males are one-third smaller than females, thus male falcons are called tiercels.

The Downtown Des Moines School has adopted the peregrine falcon as its mascot and students are anxious to attend the banding of these top-of-the-food-chain birds.

The young falcons can be viewed walking along the building's ledge as their feathers grow on the DNR's falcon cam at www.iowadnr.gov. They may not be in camera view at all times in the future. Their wing exercises will progress until their first flight attempts at about 40 days of age.

The adult falcons originated at Omaha in 2004 and from NSP Riverside power plant near Minneapolis in 2003.

Around the state two falcons have been banded in Cedar Rapids and two in the Quad Cities. The status of falcons at Alliant Energy Plant near Chillicothe will be determined on June 4.

On June 5 at 8:30 a.m., falcon young will be banded at two natural or historic falcon cliffs in northeast Iowa. Bob Anderson and Dave Kester with Raptor Resource Project will join falcon enthusiasts at Leo's Bluff just upstream from Waukon Junction on Hwy. 76, in Allamakee County. The banding crew plans to then go across the Mississippi River to band falcons at cliffs near Lynxville, Wis. Then the party plans to return to a cliff just south of Lansing, Iowa to band young at that historic cliff about 1 p.m.

Next week the DNR will schedule a time and date to band young at Iowa's newest site in McGregor. And on June 24, a public event will be hosted at the Iowa State Capitol to view young fledglings at that site. It will be on the east side of the Capitol at 11 a.m. There will not be any banding of young falcons at the Capitol due to liability concerns. Watch for more falcon updates in the coming days as this dynamic raptor resource flies across our landscape.

Media Contact: Pat Schlarbaum, wildlife diversity technician, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 515-432-2823.

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THREE WATER TRAILS OPEN THIS WEEK ACROSS IOWA

Three water trails are opening this week, and more will be scheduled as completion of others nears. More than 1,000 river miles have been developed or are currently being developed as water trails since the program launched in 2006.

This week's events are scheduled on the Des Moines, Wapsipinicon, and Boone rivers. Ceremonies involve short speeches by dignitaries and an award of certificate presented to the water trail group by a DNR official.

"It's a nice way to recognize all the hard work that has been accomplished and at the same time draw attention to the newly established water trail," said Nate Hoogveen, river programs coordinator.

DNR water trails will include low impact accesses, directional signage, informational kiosks, and a brochure with a map that assists with navigation.

"It's our hope that this infrastructure will offer convenient access to and foster a greater appreciation for our rivers," said John Wenck, river programs outreach coordinator. The public is invited to these water trail grand openings. Other activities, such as organized floats, are being planned at these events, so be sure to contact your local conservation office for more information.

The ceremony for the Des Moines River Water Trail in Polk County is scheduled for 5 p.m., on June 5, at Prospect Park, in Des Moines. Contact Polk County Conservation Board (CCB) for more information at 515-323-5300.

The Boone River designation is scheduled for 9:30 a.m., June 6, at Riverside Park, in Webster City. Contact the Hamilton CCB for more information, at 515-832-9570.

The Wapsipinicon River designation is scheduled for 1 p.m., June 6 at the Bathing Beach, Independence. There is a pre-ceremony celebration and access dedication

scheduled at Littleton at 8:30 a.m. followed by a float down the river. Contact the Buchanan CCB for more information at 319-636-2617.

Media Contact: John Wenck, river programs outreach coordinator, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, at 515-281-8969

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DNR TARGETING YOUTH ON IOWA WATERS

DES MOINES – Youth ages 2 to 13 caught on Iowa’s waterways wearing a lifejacket will receive a mock citation, a sticker and a coupon for a free small Frosty at a participating Wendy’s restaurant.

The citation is part of the “I Got Caught” campaign that rewards youth for practicing good safety habits. Other behavior that will prompt a citation is wearing a helmet while riding a bicycle, scooter, skateboard or in-line skates. The program will run throughout the summer and culminate in the fall with several bike giveaways.

The DNR is a participating law enforcement agency. The primary sponsors for the ‘I Got Caught’ campaign are Iowa Health System, AAA Minnesota/Iowa and Wendy’s Restaurants.

Iowa law requires children under age 13 to wear a life jacket while in a boat that is underway.

Media Contact: Susan Stocker, boating education coordinator, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 515-281-0122.

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COME ONE, COME ALL – A CEDAR RIVER EXPERIENCE AWAITS

DES MOINES – Whether you wish to volunteer or simply stop in to learn something new, the Iowa Department of Natural Resources would like to invite you to the seventh annual Project AWARE (A Watershed Awareness River Expedition) river cleanup event. This year’s expedition, scheduled for June 20-27, combines river cleanup, recreation and education into a meaningful and rewarding experience for all.

Volunteers can officially join the river cleanup by paddling the river or by assisting with land-based recycling initiatives, but there are opportunities for others to experience Project AWARE as well. “Infotainment” programs, for example, are held each evening and are open to the public. A complete schedule for these programs can be found on the Project AWARE website – www.iowaprojectaware.com.

In the six year history of Project AWARE, the expedition has enlisting 1,231 participants who removed more than 1,500 cubic yards of trash from more than 480 river miles. Of all the trash removed over the years, 81 percent has been recycled. Volunteers have also restored native prairie, renovated trails and enhanced recreational areas.

This year's event is expected to bring hundreds of volunteers to the Cedar River and focus on an 86-mile stretch from Wildcat Bluff near Urbana to Saulsbury Bridge Recreation Area near Muscatine. While the expedition lasts an entire week, volunteers may stay and help for as little or as long as they like.

While the work can be tough and dirty, the expedition is really one of a kind.

"Project AWARE is my RAGBRAI ... my vacation," says Cindy Watson, a four-year Project AWARE veteran. "It's a chance to come together with a bunch of other Iowans who want to make a difference and clean up our Iowa waters."

Registration is not required for the general public to attend evening programs, but it is required for those who wish to volunteer for the river cleanup itself. To avoid a late registration fee, volunteers are asked to have their registration forms postmarked by Friday, June 5.

For more information on this event or to download the registration materials, please visit www.iowaprojectaware.com or contact Brian Soenen at Brian.Soenen@dnr.iowa.gov or (515) 205-8587.

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OUTDOOR PHOTOS AVAILABLE FOR COMPUTER WALLPAPER

The Iowa Department of Natural Resources has a way to dress up your computer wallpaper with high quality Iowa outdoor photography.

Seasonal images of Iowa and wildlife are available in various sizes to match computer resolutions. Check back throughout the year for new images.

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NONRESIDENTS TO PAY MORE TO HUNT IN IOWA

The price for nonresidents to hunt in Iowa increased on May 27 when Iowa Governor Chet Culver signed into law a bill that increased the a nonresident hunting license from \$80.50 to \$110.50, and a deer hunting preference point from \$10 to \$50.50. Preference points are awarded to nonresidents who apply for any deer licenses, but do not get drawn.

All information regarding the nonresident deer application process and applicable costs can be found on our website at www.iowadnr.gov. Nonresidents may apply for an any-deer license or preference point through June 7.

In order to apply for the nonresident lottery drawing or to purchase a preference point, hunters must either go to the DNR website at www.iowadnr.gov or call 1-800-367-1188.

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2009 DNR SALE SET FOR JUNE 20

DES MOINES – The Iowa DNR will hold an auction on June 20, at the Elwell Family Food Center on the Iowa State Fairgrounds. The gates open at 8 a.m. when the public may view the items for sale and the auction will begin around 9 a.m.

A buyer's premium fee will be added to all sales to pay for the auctioneer.

Items up for auction will only include firearms and bows, no other equipment will be sold. The items are sold "as is" with no guarantee or warranty.

Any person interested in purchasing a firearm at the auction must have either a valid Iowa permit to acquire pistols or revolvers, a federal firearms license, or a professional or non-professional permit to carry concealed weapons. The Iowa permit to acquire can be obtained from a sheriff's office. Allow two to three weeks to receive the permit.

Payment must be made on auction day. All sales are final. Firearms must be removed from the site within one half hour after the sale of the firearm is completed.

The Iowa DNR reserves the right to reject any bids and withdraw any item from the sale at any time. To receive a copy of the sale bill, send an email to susan.davenport@dnr.iowa.gov or a self addressed stamped #10 envelop to Surplus Sale, Iowa DNR, 502 E. 9th St., Des Moines, IA 50319.

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