

# *Iowa Outdoors*

*Iowa Department of Natural Resources*

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[Electronic photos available upon request]

## **EGG LAYING SNAPPING TURTLE BECOMES NORTH IOWA TRAFFIC STOPPER**

By Lowell Washburn

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

Iowa turtles are on the move. It happens every summer as a variety of normally aquatic species such as snappers, painteds, and Blanding's turtles temporarily forsake the murky depths of local ponds and marshes to march overland across crop fields, parking lots, and roadways. Most are females in search of adequate nesting grounds. For turtles, that means sun drenched areas of coarse sand where females can dig holes and deposit their eggs.

Although the annual ritual is rarely observed by humans, there are exceptions. A classic example occurred earlier this week at Clear Lake when a 25-plus-pound female snapping turtle became a literal traffic stopper. Upon leaving the muddy environs of the lake's Miller's Bay Marsh, the huge stegosaurus-tailed reptile immediately began excavating a large nest crater along the shoulder of the busy residential South Shore Drive blacktop. As soon as the activity was complete the old Mossy Back began filling the hole with its clutch of white, ping-pong-ball-sized eggs.

"I first noticed the turtle yesterday afternoon, and I think she was already scouting a place to lay her eggs," said Frank Clark, a South Shore resident who lives directly across the road from Miller's Bay.

"I'm pretty sure it had to be the same turtle; not many snappers get to be that big anymore," Clark added.

As soon as the turtle reached the blacktop's shoulder, she began emitting a "huge

quantity of fluid,” said Clark. Before long, the hard packed gravel shoulder had become soft and muddy. The snapper then used the heavy claws of her rear feet to begin excavating the crater.

“It was just amazing to watch,” said Clark. “As soon as the hole was finished, she began dropping eggs. She was laying them two at time about two or three minutes apart. The whole process was just fascinating.”

Other Clear Lake residents agreed with Clark’s assessment. Before long, the nesting turtle had attracted a significant crowd of interested passer-bys. And as the cell phone telegraph spread the word, more and more residents traveled to witness the event.

After filling the hole with more than a dozen huge eggs, the snapper surprised onlookers by “softening the earth” and then starting a second cavity just a foot or so farther down the road. After boring a full 10 inches into the packed hardpan, the reptile immediately began to fill its second nest ---- this time depositing more than 20 shiny eggs.

Masters of disaster, snapping turtles bite freely when threatened and are known to possess one of the vilest temperaments to be found anywhere in the outdoors. But in this particular case, the huge snapper’s only interest was in accomplishing the task at hand. Oblivious to the growing crowd of wildlife watchers, she never emitted so much as a warning hiss ---- even when people moved uncomfortably close to obtain souvenir photos.

“I don’t know exactly how many different people have been by to see this, but it’s been a lot,” said Clark. “I’ve seen a lot of sun [painted] turtles come out of the marsh to lay eggs, but this is the first time I’ve seen a snapping turtle come up here. It’s unusual, and she’s definitely a big one.”

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## **NEW STORM LAKE MARINA DEDICATION JUNE 23**

Des Moines – From an eyesore to a blessing for boaters, the new Storm Lake Marina will be formally dedicated at a special ceremony June 23, 3:30 p.m., announced the Iowa DNR.

The new marina replaces a worn out facility that offered little other than a boat ramp and repair services to the 3,100-acre lake’s boaters. After two years in construction and about \$3.1 million, the site now provides just about everything the busy lake’s skippers need, just off Hwy. 110 on the southwest corner of the lake.

“After deepening the bay and removing the island, the marina supports 84 slips for seasonal renting. New boat ramps, ample parking and courtesy docks make day-use of the lake a breeze. The large boat repair/sales building and modern concession facility with restrooms, supplies, and fuel availability are all vital essentials boaters need to enjoy their outings,” described Pat Boddy, deputy director of the DNR

Boddy, who will lead the dedication event, explained how the state was able to complete the project during tough economic times.

“We started when times were better and earmarked the money back then to produce this top notch facility. Funding came from the marine fuel tax, the U.S. Coast Guard, and from DOT’s park and institutional road fund, so no general fund tax dollars were necessary,” said Boddy. All of the work was completed by about 10 different Iowa contractors, and the docks were built in Ida Grove by Midwest Industries (Shore Station).

Storm Lake Mayor Jon Kruse joined Boddy in encouraging the public to attend the dedication and collect their commemorative gift before coming to the Lake Preservation Association’s annual picnic at the Sunrise Pointe Golf Clubhouse, beginning at 6 that evening.

**For more information, contact Ross Harrison, DNR 515-281-5973**  
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## **ALCOHOL TARGET OF BOATING ENFORCEMENT WEEKEND**

DES MOINES – Iowa is one of 48 states and territories participating in a weekend long boating under the influence detection and enforcement during June 26 – 28. Operation Dry Water is aimed at reducing the number of alcohol related accidents and fatalities and to foster a stronger and more visible deterrent to alcohol use on the water.

“Curbing the number of alcohol related accidents and fatalities is a key to achieving safer and more enjoyable recreation boating,” said Susan Stocker, recreation boating safety coordinator for the Iowa Department of Natural Resources.

In 2008, Iowa statistics show that 25 percent of boating incidents involved alcohol. There were no boating fatalities in 2008. Iowa continues to rank as one of the top three safest states for recreational boating, based on the U.S. Coast Guard fatality ratio.

Currently, enforcement officers in Polk, Marion and Scott counties are participating in the event.

The National Association of State Boating Law Administrators is coordinating this national event. For a complete list of participating state agencies, go to [www.operationdrywater.org](http://www.operationdrywater.org)

**Media Contact: Susan Stocker, boating education coordinator, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 515-313-6439.**

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## **EXPLORE IOWA'S GREAT NATURAL RESOURCES THIS SUMMER**

June has been proclaimed Great Outdoors Month as a way to encourage Iowans to put down the video game, turn off the television and head outside.

There are enough wonderful natural resources in Iowa for everyone to enjoy, from camping to bird-watching to canoeing. Try something new this year like geo-caching or fishing. Or, if you are a seasoned pro, take along someone who has never had the opportunity and show them the ropes. You could gain a hiking or fishing buddy for life.

There are many physical and psychological benefits to getting out and enjoying the great outdoors. Research shows that kids who regularly play outside have lower stress levels, tend to play more creatively and have a greater respect for themselves, for others and for the environment. It has been discovered that good old-fashioned dirt contains a variety of microbes, bacteria and viruses that are actually *good* for kids by helping boost their immune systems. So take the kids outside and get dirty this month.

The Great American Backyard Campout is June 27 so, grab your tent and the marshmallows and head out to a state park or at the least, your own backyard, for a campout. Watch the stars light up the sky as you tell stories and connect, not only with the great outdoors, but also each other.

This is the perfect opportunity to start traditions that will last a lifetime.

**For more information, contact the DNR's Aquatic Education Program at 641-747-2200; email: [AquaticEd\\_Info@dnr.iowa.gov](mailto:AquaticEd_Info@dnr.iowa.gov).**

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