

# *Iowa Outdoors*

*Iowa Department of Natural Resources*

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**June 23, 2009**

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## **SUMMER HEAT CRANKS UP BOAT TRAFFIC ON IOWA LAKES**

CLEAR LAKE – Summer has arrived in a hot way and is sending boaters to Iowa lakes in large numbers. Iowa lakes will likely resemble parking lots in the next week as Fourth of July festivities switch into high gear.

The Iowa Department of Natural Resources will increase its lake patrol presence to encourage safe boating and to increase awareness about boating while intoxicated.

“Boaters need to be aware that extra stressors like the wind, sun, and motor vibration actually can increase the effect of alcohol on the operator and passengers while on the water,” said Ben Bergman, conservation officer for the DNR at Clear Lake. “Here at Clear Lake, we are working with a local business to promote safe and sober boat operation. The program allows those who identify themselves as boat operators, free non alcoholic beverages at P.M. Park, on the south side of the lake.”

The Iowa DNR will be participating in Operation Dry Water on June 26 to 28, which is a national campaign of boating under the influence detection and enforcement to reduce the number of alcohol related accidents and fatalities, and to foster a stronger and more visible deterrent to alcohol use on the water.

The DNR will also be promoting life jacket use and at Clear Lake, local businesses have donated t-shirts that law enforcement will hand out to boaters caught wearing life jackets. The t-shirts, which say “I Got Caught Wearing My Life Jacket,” were provided by Clear Lake Boats, the Clear Lake Area Chamber of Commerce, Clear

Lake Bank and Trust and Theiss Shirts. Other “I Got Caught” efforts targeting children will be handed out across Iowa water bodies.

Bergman said he is seeing an increase in boat traffic on the lake, likely due to the approach of the holiday weekend and because the spring had been cool and wet. Since the boating season had been delayed somewhat, Bergman said boat operators should check their safety equipment before heading to the water.

Make sure the fire extinguisher is charged, life jackets are in good condition and there are enough for each person on board, look for the sounding device and make sure to have the current boat registration on board. Boaters should prepare for busy boat ramps and heavy lake use so courtesy and patience will be a hot commodity.

“This is the best time for boating because of the warmer weather,” Bergman said. “Boaters who know the rules and the requirements have a good start to being a responsible operator.”

### **SIDEBAR: SAFETY WHILE SWIMMING**

A near drowning at Clear Lake over the weekend has DNR lake patrol reminding swimmers to know their limitations. A man swam outside of the swim buoys at Clear Lake State Park and into deeper water where he became distressed. He was about 700 feet from shore when a person heard his cries for help and rescued the individual.

“Swimmers should stay within the swim buoys at all times, and I would recommend and encourage life jacket use to those who are jumping off anchored boats, docks or swimming at the beaches,” said Ben Bergman, conservation officer with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources at Clear Lake. “Swimmers need to know the limits of their abilities.”

**Media Contact: Ben Bergman, Conservation Officer, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, at 641-425-0828**

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### **HONEY CREEK RESORT STATE PARK IS ALL ABOUT NATURE**

Visit any Iowa state park and you’ll find nature is the prevailing theme. At Iowa’s newest state park, Honey Creek Resort, you’ll find a first-class nature experience awaits you.

Honey Creek Resort was designed to give visitors the chance to enjoy Iowa’s natural beauty in a very comfortable environment.

“We welcome both the seasoned nature lover and the tentative outdoors person, and everyone in between,” says Jeremie Slagle, resort manager. “We want all our visitors to enjoy the resort at what ever level of outdoor experience they are comfortable

with. We are all about helping people enjoy nature and the beautiful outdoor setting we have here.”

Nature programming is a key component of the resort. Honey Creek has two resident naturalists on staff to guide visitors in understanding more about Iowa’s environment and all it has to offer. The regularly scheduled programs usually have seasonal themes with lots of hands-on opportunities. Some are geared towards kids, but most are appropriate for all ages, and all are open to the public whether they are guests of the resort or not.

“Most of our programs are about an hour long,” says Mike Godby, DNR naturalist for the resort, “and may include hiking, live animal exhibits, exploration activities, campfire stories, nature crafts or outdoor skills. We can also customize our programs for large group events at the resort or in the surrounding communities.”

“Summer is a great time for water-related activities and Lake Rathbun provides the perfect setting for all kinds of outdoor sports,” says Godby. “We want people to not just learn about nature but to get out and enjoy it. We can provide basic fishing lessons or help with a specific fishing technique. We have kayaks and fishing gear and even backpacks filled with tools and gadgets to help discover the outdoors.”

Trails throughout the resort help visitors explore the outdoors at their leisure. About a dozen large interpretive panels will be installed throughout the Honey Creek complex this summer to help visitors learn more about the flora, fauna, environmental features and conservation practices on site. The trail system at the park guides hikers through Iowa’s three major ecosystems -- prairie, woodlands and wetlands.

In addition to some wonderful overlooks and scenic views on the trails, a wildlife observation blind is available along the nature trail.

“We have some amazing wildlife viewing at Honey Creek,” says Godby, “particularly when it comes to bird watching.”

“With the variety of ecotypes at the resort, plus the large lake, spring migration can be phenomenal,” says Godby. “Really, anytime of year is great for bird watching at Honey Creek. We see bald eagles pretty regularly in the winter, large flotillas of pelicans in the spring and fall and, of course, wild turkeys year-round.”

An elaborate array of bird feeders, scattered around the lodge’s large windows, bring wildlife up close to the lodge.

The Lake Rathbun area has long been known for its great hunting and fishing. Southern Iowa holds bragging rights to some of the best deer and turkey hunting in the state, but the Rathbun area is also known for good waterfowl and upland game hunting as well. With approximately 10,000 acres of public hunting land in the area and access to one of Iowa’s premier fishing lakes, Honey Creek Resort is a natural destination choice for the hunter or angler.

The Lake Rathbun is the top walleye fishery south of I-80 and is maintained as a walleye brood fish lake. The DNR’s Rathbun fish hatchery is a state-of-the-art facility that produces walleye and channel catfish and is home to muskies during the winter. Tour arrangements can be made for large groups by calling 641-647-2406. Small groups can take a self-guided tour of the hatchery Monday through Friday from 7:45 a.m. to 3:45 p.m. The hatchery is less than a 15-minute drive from the resort and a worthwhile trip to learn more about Iowa’s fisheries.

The whole nature experience at Honey Creek Resort is enhanced by the subtle environmental stewardship messages and “green” practices woven throughout the facility.

The resort’s outdoor lighting will minimize “light pollution,” creating safe parking lots and walkways, but saving electricity and preserving the dark night sky for star gazing.

Because the resort’s golf course design protects the environment, conserves natural resources and provides wildlife habitat, the Preserve is expected to earn the National Audubon Society’s seal of approval.

Bioswales, bioretention basins and native grass plantings have all been incorporated into the Honey Creek landscape to reduce and filter storm water runoff and minimize erosion into the Lake Rathbun watershed. Thanks to EPA funding from their non-point source pollution program, interpretive signage will help explain these conservation practices.

“Everything at the resort encourages people to discover Iowa’s outdoors. We have beautiful nature photography throughout our buildings. Even our cabins are named after the birds, butterflies, trees and prairie plants found in the area,” says Slagle.

For more information about Honey Creek Resort State Park or to make a reservation, visit [www.HoneyCreekResort.com](http://www.HoneyCreekResort.com) or call 877-677-3344.

**Media Contact: Michelle Wilson, project manager for Honey Creek Resort State Park, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 515-281-8675.**

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## **FALCONS OVER IOWA**

DES MOINES - There will be a public peregrine falcon event on the east side of the state Capitol at 11 a.m., June 24. This program is timed for viewing any fledgling falcons taking their first flights from their nesting ledge.

Speakers will be celebrating the rejuvenated peregrine falcon population in Iowa including the upgrading their status from endangered to a species of special concern.

Currently, there are 13 nesting pairs of falcons in Iowa which produced at least 24 young.

The goal of five nesting pairs with as many as 10 territories has been maintained in Iowa since 2004. With the four young and two adult falcons downtown and the same at the Capitol, falcon enthusiasts could enjoy as many as a dozen falcons over the Capitol city in the coming weeks. They will not “darken the skies’ with their numbers, but incredible aerial displays of their flying prowess will be ongoing.

Attendees are encouraged to bring lawn chairs or blankets for shaded area of Capitol grounds.

**Media Contact: Pat Schlarbaum, wildlife diversity technician, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, at 515-432-2823 ext 104, or cell phone 712-330-0526.**

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## **IT'S IN THE BAG – LITTER THAT IS**

Iowa's state park staff will be handing out reusable trash bags this holiday weekend to help campers and visitors with the carry in carry out trash policy at state parks.

The bags are approximately 18 x 25 inches and made from recycled plastic. They look like a mesh onion bag and are meant to be reused.

"We're also hoping people will carry the bags with them when they are hiking or strolling around the park and help park staff in keeping the parks litter free," says Jim Lawson, district park supervisor for the DNR.

"Iowa's state parks are feeling the same economic pinch we all are this year," says Gerry Schnepf, executive director of Keep Iowa Beautiful and person behind the free bag idea. "Without their normal seasonal help, it is hard to keep up with general maintenance of the park. We're hoping the bags will help promote good stewardship of not just individual campsites and parks, but the whole state of Iowa."

According to Schnepf, litter costs Iowan's nearly \$30 million per year to clean up. "The July 4 holiday is around the corner and maybe someday Iowan's can celebrate our independence from litter," said Schnepf.

The bags were made possible through contributions from Keep Iowa Beautiful, Waste Management, Prairie Meadows, DNR, Metro Waste Authority, Waste Commission of Scott County, Iowa Society of Solid Waste Operations and the Iowa Parks Foundation.

The reusable bags will also be distributed by DNR waters officers around the state and by the bag sponsors.

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**Media Contact: Jerry Schnepf, executive director, Keep Iowa Beautiful, 515-323-6507**

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[Electronic photos available upon request]

**YELLOW-HEADED BLACKBIRDS BRING SUMMER WETLANDS TO LIFE**

By Lowell Washburn  
Iowa Department of Natural Resources

For resident members of yellow-headed blackbird colonies, a spectacularly successful nesting season is rapidly winding down. Although a handful of males still voice battle anthems from atop swaying cattail stalks, the unique tightly woven over-the-water grass baskets that once held eggs and babies are now empty. Although many remain incapable of sustained flight, this year's crop of youngsters is now fledged. And although the awkward babies still cling desperately to nearby marsh vegetation and loudly beg food from their mothers, it won't be long until they'll begin hunting insects on their own.

Few things make a summer wetland seem more alive than does an active nesting colony of yellow-headed blackbirds. Yellow-heads are a lot like some people, they want neighbors --- but they don't want them too close. To the casual observer, a nesting colony appears to be pure chaos as pairs vie for nesting space and males conduct constant aerial dog fights. By there is an underlying order to it all, and everyone eventually finds their own space.

Although yellow-heads remain an extremely common summer resident in northern Iowa's prairie marsh country, the species is comparatively rare in the south. In Illinois, the yellow-headed blackbird is listed as an endangered species. This unique and interesting marsh creature is just one more good reason for protecting Iowa's fragile wetland habitats.

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## **GIRLS GET OUTDOORS**

By Joe Wilkinson  
Iowa Department of Natural Resources

With a tentative grip, the 14-year-old locked her finger and thumb around the 10-inch largemouth bass. A few other hands reached out to touch the slimy fish. "Who knows why fish produce slime," queried instructor Karen Osterkamp, as a couple other fish were passed through the crowd.

Not your typical curriculum, but neither was the setting, here on the edge of a ravine at Springbrook Education Center, near Guthrie Center. More than 60 teen and nearly teen girls were on an Outdoor Journey; learning outdoor skills in a supportive environment. On OJ, they literally got their hands dirty, as well as wet and a little slimy before it was over. "We learned that some fish have sharp, pointy teeth and some have more like sandpaper (mouth)," reported Macy Marek, of Riverside. "And their fins can be real 'pokey' if you touch them wrong."

She and her friend Kaitlin Hora, from Ainsworth, also gave high marks to the rifle and shotgun course. "I was pretty good with the rifle. My grouping was real close together," pointed out Kaitlin.

A couple more Outdoor Journey sessions are set this summer, for girls 12 through 15. For boys, the Hunting and Conservation Camp (HACC) offers much the same program. There's even Becoming an Outdoor Woman (BOW) for moms or even older sisters. And these campers don't leave behind *all* the modern conveniences. Air conditioned dorms and cafeteria food take the sting out of slippery fish, a wet canoe seat or a brush with nettles.

Still, the idea is to get close to the outdoors, not just read about it. "It doesn't matter if you have no skill in the activities," stresses Donise Grygierczyk, coordinator of the June OJ. "Some of the girls didn't know what a canoe looked like. Others had been out in one before." That's important as the conservation community tries to reach an increasingly urban population in Iowa. As more people lose their direct link to the land, it can be a little harder to appreciate—and *maintain*--our natural resources. The outdoor programs bridge that gap.

Sometimes, though, it becomes a career path. Chelsie Thompson was an Outdoor Journey participant seven years ago. She had done some family supervised shooting, but knew nothing about canoeing, fishing and other outdoor pastimes. She returned this season as a chaperone. "I'm actually going to school now for earth science with an interpretative degree," laughed Thompson. "I worked at an outfitter for three years doing canoeing, kayaking, backpacking. I'm an avid hunter; late muzzleloader and bow." Volunteers and sponsors are the backbone of Outdoor Journey and its companion programs. Conservation group chapters foot much of the bill for the campers.

The sessions start with the basics; safety first...how to cast a line, hold your paddle or tie fishing line to a hook. The key there, is to start big. Asia Kleower of Harlan used the foot long wire model. "Put it through this big hole; eye-ish thing; then wrap around it...at least 6 times," she counseled, counting out loud as she wrapped the cotton practice cord. "Then there's a little hole right here; we stick it through," she said, holding up the results.

A final test of sorts, came on the last afternoon, when 60 girls surrounded one end of Springbrook Lake. One hour, 10 fish and a small turtle later, they were still laughing and convinced that they'd bring in a monster. "I caught a 'sunny' (sunfish) on a light line with night crawlers," declared Sydney Housh, of Mount Pleasant. She was watching the surface for signs of fish activity. "Then I reeled it back in kind of slow and steady. When I got it to the spot where they were feeding, it bit, pretty quick," explained the young angler.

And at least as important as HOW to do it, the campers learn why they do it, too. "Hopefully, they will learn how important our environment is," underscored Grygierczyk. "Each of these girls realizes better what they might not have, if (the outdoor opportunity) wasn't here."

For information on Outdoor Journey, or other outdoor skills workshops, go to [www.iowadnr.gov](http://www.iowadnr.gov) and click on (left side) 'Camps & Workshops.'

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## **UNIQUE IOWA VACATIONS SHOWCASED IN OUTDOOR MAGAZINE**

DES MOINES – The July/August issue of *Iowa Outdoors*, the Iowa Department of Natural Resources bi-monthly magazine, has an article listing Iowa-equivalent vacation destinations, but at a fraction of the national destination cost.

The article showcases Iowa's unique areas to explore this summer and is available for free on-line at <http://www.iowadnr.gov/magazine/index.html>.

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