

Iowa Outdoors

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

www.iowadnr.gov

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BOAT REGISTRATIONS NOT DUE UNTIL 2010

DES MOINES – Boat owners in Iowa are reminded that their registration renewal is not due until April 1, 2010. Iowa's 232,000 boat owners will either receive a reminder in the mail from their county recorder, or by publication, alerting them when their registration is due.

In 2007, the Iowa boat registration process switched from being due in odd numbered years to a three year cycle and any boats purchased during the cycle would receive a prorated fee to complete the cycle.

An article in the current edition of *Iowa Game and Fish* incorrectly stated renewals were due April 1, 2009.

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DNR TO HOST PUBLIC MEETING APRIL 29 ON PROPOSED WILDLIFE RULES

DES MOINES – The Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is hosting a public meeting to discuss a number of new proposed regulations including changes to

deer, waterfowl, and turkey hunting seasons and some changes to the trapping seasons. The meeting will be conducted over the Iowa Communications Network (ICN) on April 29, from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m.

“This is an opportunity for our hunters and people who support wildlife to give us some feedback on these regulations,” said Dale Garner, chief of the DNR’s wildlife bureau. “We will go over the proposed regulations and seasons and our rationale behind each change, and take comments from anyone willing to speak, then, if there is any time remaining, we will open the discussion to other topics.”

The proposed changes include reducing the number of fall turkey hunting licenses that will be available, changing the counties that will be open for the November and January antlerless deer seasons and changing when the antlerless licenses for these seasons will go on sale. Other topics include proposed waterfowl season dates and restrictions on placing traps in roadways before the trapping season begins.

Any interested person may make written suggestions or comments on the proposed changes on or before April 29, 2009. Persons who wish to convey their views orally should contact the Wildlife Bureau at (515) 281-5034 or at the Wildlife Bureau offices on the fourth floor of the Wallace State Office Building. Written comments may be sent to the Wildlife Bureau Chief, Department of Natural Resources, Wallace State Office Building, Des Moines, Iowa 50319-0034; or faxed to (515) 281-6794.

The DNR will have staff members from the wildlife bureau at each site to answer questions, and to take any written comments.

ICN Locations:

Ames	Ames High School, 20 th and Ridgewood
Calmar	Northeast Iowa Community College, Dairy Education Center, 1527 Hwy. 150 South
Centerville	Centerville High School, 600 CHS Drive
Clinton	Graphic Arts Technology Center of Iowa, 1951 Manufacturing Drive
Council Bluffs	Abraham Lincoln High School, 1205 Bonham Avenue
Creston	Creston High School, 601 West Townline Road
Dubuque	Dubuque Senior High School, 1800 Clarke Drive
Fort Dodge	St. Edmund High School, 501 N. 22 nd Street
Iowa City	Iowa City High School, 1900 Morningside Drive
Johnston	Johnston High School, 6501 NW 62 nd Avenue
Marion	Marion Public Library, 1095 6 th Avenue
Marshalltown	Marshalltown High School, 1602 S. 2 nd Avenue
Mason City	North Iowa Area Community College – 4, 500 College Drive
Ottumwa	Ottumwa High School, 501 E. 2 nd
Sioux City	Central Campus Individual Learning Center, 1121 Jackson Street
Spencer	Spencer High School, 800 East 3 rd Street
Waterloo	Hawkeye Community College – 1, 1501 E. Orange Road
West Burlington	Southeastern Community College – 1, 1500 West Agency

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REPORTS OF WINTER KILLS IN LAKES AND PONDS COMING IN AS ICE MELTS

By Joe Wilkinson

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

The calls come in about this time of year. Winter ice has melted and a pond owner or early season angler heads down to check things out. Dead fish? Not a good sign.

“I’m getting lots of calls. We had a fairly hard winter again and people are calling about fish kills on ponds,” relays Scott Gritters, fisheries management biologist for the Department of Natural Resources. You can expect a few fish to die each winter. However, a deep blanket of snow can mean problems. “Heavy snow—and we had a lot of it through December into January--keeps sunlight from penetrating through the ice,” notes Gritters. “That causes algae in the pond to die back, which depletes oxygen.”

In Iowa, there are about 90,000 ponds. Most are farm ponds, holding water from surrounding slopes or hillsides. They often provide watering holes for livestock. A growing number of ponds are showing up in towns, too; especially as developers and city planners work to contain runoff.

Well managed ponds are excellent fisheries. A strong zooplankton/insect base feed the bluegills or other panfish. Most of them end up as dinner for larger predator fish. However, as thousands of their siblings are consumed, the rest grow to decent sizes; delighting anglers young and old. And with a good forage base, those predators--largemouth bass for instance—hit trophy sizes. Throw in some channel catfish, which aren’t choosy about whether their food is still living, and you can develop a balanced ‘back 40’ fishery.

So now, after a hard winter, you have to assess the damage. “I ask people to walk around the pond and see what kind of fish are dead,” says Gritters. “If it’s mostly large fish, then the smaller fish—which need less oxygen—might have survived. As they grow, they should fill that big fish gap. If the shoreline is littered with dead fish of different sizes then that indicates a widespread die off.”

In that case, restocking may be your next move. Private hatcheries and other commercial vendors--even some farm supply stores--offer various fish stocking options. The DNR does as well; though the pond stocking program revolves around that three species combination. Young-of-the-year bluegill and catfish are shipped early in the fall. By the next summer, largemouth bass are available. The pond owner is charged \$25 an acre for the stocking and certain other requirements must be met; such as pond acreage, depth and whether livestock are kept *out*. Information is available at www.iowa.dnr.gov or by calling your area fisheries biologist.

Oh, and to nip in the bud one of the most commonly asked questions, ‘No, you do NOT have to let anyone fish in your pond just because the DNR stocked it.’ But since angler license sales help offset the cost of pond stocking, it is always appreciated if pond owners do allow some angler access.

Of course, prevention is better than restocking. An inspection of your pond can determine whether it is too shallow, or perhaps whether it has too much nutrient-load or chemical runoff entering it. Any of those factors can lead to problems.

If it is in good shape, the best prevention comes in the winter. “A lot of people look at aerators for their ponds. That is a viable solution,” says Gritters. “A cheaper method is just to scoop the snow from the ice; to let light penetrate.” He admits, though, repeated shoveling after each heavy snowfall can get old in a hurry.

From there, as long as you don’t upset the balance in the pond, lunker bass and hand-sized bluegills can be common. Biologists usually advise setting up a catch and release policy for any big bass. Some have to remain in the pond to eat into the forage base. Otherwise, an overpopulation of stunted bluegills, for instance, will appear. Likewise, catfish do not readily reproduce in such confined settings and you shouldn’t take too many.

Maintain a balance in that pond—whether it is in a cattle pasture or a subdivision—and the payoff will be great fishing across four seasons.

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CLEAR LAKE ANGLER LANDS TROPHY FISH ON SEASON’S FIRST CAST

By Lowell Washburn

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

CLEAR LAKE---Although this year’s open water angling season is just beginning, Clear Lake’s Riley Finer has already registered one whale of a fish story.

On Tuesday afternoon, with chill winds whipping and Clear Lake still partially covered in ice, Finer decided to make a few test casts into an area of open water at the public boat ramp at North Shore’s McIntosh Woods State Park.

On his very first cast of the season, Finer felt something suddenly stop his lure. Finer pulled and that ‘something’ pulled back and the battle was on. Several arm straining minutes later, the angler successfully landed his first catch of the year --- a 47-inch, 30-pound musky.

Although Finer was alone, he did have a credible witness to the event.

“I was just driving through the park when I saw Riley cast out into the open water,” said DNR Conservation Officer, Ken Lonneman. “I pulled over and saw that he had hooked a fish. Because he couldn’t pull it in, I figured he had hooked a huge carp. Several minutes later, I finally saw its tail fin break water and realized what was going on. I helped Riley land the fish and we were both pretty excited.

“It really is an incredible story,” said Lonneman. “We [DNR] often tell people that the musky is ‘the fish of ten thousand casts, or maybe just one.’ In this case, it was just one.”

After obtaining a souvenir photo, Finer released his trophy back into the frigid waters of Clear Lake.

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MAHASKA COUNTY'S EYHERALDE NAMED 2009 BRASS BLUEGILL AWARD WINNER

DES MOINES – Pete Eyheralde, naturalist for Mahaska County Conservation Board, is the 2009 recipient of the *Brass Bluegill Award*. The award is presented each year to an instructor who has established an outstanding local program that exemplifies the goals of *Fish Iowa!*

An angler at an early age, Eyheralde always looked forward to the fishing trips with his “Pop.” He distinctly remembers cold wet hands, big fish, and his little brother eating the bait while fishing near his childhood home.

For the past 10 years, Eyheralde has used *Fish Iowa!* to introduce fishing to thousands of youth in Mahaska County. He works with the Oskaloosa YMCA, ISU Extension, the Oskaloosa Library, Cub Scouts, and local day care providers to take kids fishing throughout the summer. The yearly summer “Fishn’ Camp” sponsored by the Mahaska CCB is one of the most popular day camps offered. Campers are introduced to a variety of fishing experiences from big rivers, to lakes, to farm ponds and creeks.

Most of the classroom programs Eyheralde presents involve teaching about fish ecology and fishing. He has used *Fish Iowa!* and Hooked on Fishing Not on Drugs® materials as part of the local elementary schools’ Red Ribbon Week programs. He is currently working with local P.E. teachers to help them incorporate fishing into their curriculum.

Eyheralde runs a monthly after school program designed to get kids active outside in all types of weather to learn new types of outdoor recreation. He has also helped run the Mahaska County 4-H fishing club.

Eyheralde will be presented the Brass Bluegill Award on April 9, in Story County.

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ANNUAL RIVER CLEANUP ROUTE AND DATES ANNOUNCED

DES MOINES – The Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is looking for adventuresome volunteers to take part in the seventh annual Project AWARE (A Watershed Awareness River Expedition) river cleanup event.

This year’s expedition, scheduled for June 20-27, is expected to bring hundreds of volunteers to the Cedar River to clean it up from Center Point to Muscatine, a distance of nearly 86 miles. Volunteers participate by floating the river in a canoe or kayak and cleaning up river trash along the way. Opportunities for land based volunteers are also available. While the expedition lasts an entire week, volunteers may stay and help for as little or as long as they like.

Project AWARE combines river cleanup, recreation and education into a meaningful and rewarding experience for volunteers. Past participants have said that

AWARE is one of the greatest ways for someone to connect with nature and make a difference in protecting it.

In the six-year history of Project AWARE, the expedition has sported an impressive track record, enlisting 1,231 participants who have cleaned up more than 480 river miles and removed over 1,500 cubic yards of trash, of which 81 percent has been recycled. Volunteers have also restored native prairie, renovated trails and enhanced recreational areas.

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.”

Project AWARE is an initiative of the DNR’s IOWATER and Iowa Water Trails Programs.

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

SCIENTISTS LOOK TO OUTER SPACE TO SOLVE IOWA DUCK MYSTERY

By Lowell Washburn

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

KEOKUK---Tens of thousands of migrating lesser scaup [bluebill] ducks are currently visiting Iowa wetlands as they surge northward toward Canadian nesting areas. One of the migration’s most important stopovers is Pool 19 of the Mississippi River.

Swarming here from winter resorts in Texas, Louisiana, and Cuba, the birds arrive to refuel on abundant populations of fingernail clams. Once the birds have fed and rested, they will leave the Mississippi and head northwest across the continent. It is the beginning of a journey that will terminate on the remote, boreal forest breeding grounds of northern Canada.

But although the river’s waterfowl concentrations are impressive, all is not well. Scaup populations are on the wane ---- down an alarming 50 percent from the 7 million breeding birds inventoried during the 1970s. Although no can say why, researchers are currently seeking the answer. During the past four years, Iowa’s Pool 19 has become the focal point of intense scientific investigation as biologists from across the U.S. and Canada attempt to unravel the mysteries surrounding the decline.

During the past week, scientists have used baited, wire live-traps to capture and mark a large sample of the river’s migrating scaup population. According to Louisiana State University Professor and scaup research coordinator, Alan Afton, more than 6,000 of the ducks have been weighed, measured, and then marked with individually numbered metal leg bands. As bands are reported by hunters it will aid scientists in compiling data

needed to make intelligent scaup management decisions.

“In addition to placing bands on those thousands of migrating scaup, we have also equipped an additional 17 females with satellite transmitters,” says Afton. “As those birds continue their migration, they will be tracked by satellite on a daily basis. This effort marks the third year that we’ve attempted to track females to the breeding grounds and then back south again in the fall. Last spring, most of the females ended up in the boreal forest region of northwest Canada, and one duck went all the way to Alaska.

“During the past two years we’ve discovered that, on average, migrating females only make a total of six stops between Keokuk, Iowa and the boreal ponds of northwest Canada. Although there were several mortalities during the nesting season or along the migration trail, only two of those radioed ducks were shot by hunters.”

As this spring’s group of radioed hens departs Iowa for the northern nesting grounds, space stationed satellites will continue to monitor the ducks’ whereabouts on a daily basis. In most instances, the information will be “location specific” to where biologists can pinpoint [to within feet] the exact wetlands northbound scaup are using.

“We’re doing everything possible to get a handle on the things affecting this population,” said Afton. “Although there are theories, no one can say for certain why the scaup decline is occurring.

“What we do know is that migrating scaup are in really good [physical] condition when they arrive at Keokuk each spring. But by the time those same birds arrive in northwestern Minnesota, they are in poor body condition.”

“Once we pinpoint the exact wetlands scaup are using, we can go in and sample those locations for food,” says Afton. “Once we determine what types of wetlands the birds prefer during migration, we can go in and look at the landscape features affecting those habitats. If we can identify a fairly narrow corridor that scaup are utilizing, then we can focus on improving the condition of those particular wetlands.”

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