

Iowa Outdoors

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

www.iowadnr.gov

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March 31, 2009

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ADVISORY COMMITTEE OFFERS 16 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IOWA'S DEER HERD

An advisory committee appointed by the 2008 Iowa Legislature to examine Iowa's deer management program has issued its recommendations in their report presented to the legislature earlier this month. The committee, consisting of a cross section of Iowa business, agriculture, conservation, government and legislators met last fall to take a hard look at Iowa's deer herd.

The purpose of the committee was to study the best way to maintain a sustainable, socially acceptable deer population in the state while maximizing and balancing the economic value of deer hunting to Iowa's economy with the needs of the agricultural industry and public safety concerns.

The committee developed six questions at its first meeting that would be the focus for future meetings. Those questions were what is the status of Iowa's deer population, harvest and population management programs; the economic impact and value of Iowa's deer population; the cost of damage to crops caused by deer; the number and cost of motor vehicle accidents caused by deer; a review of the deer management challenges and programs of other Midwestern states; and an assessment of public opinion concerning the number of deer and the impact and value of Iowa's deer population.

The committee used information from those questions to form their recommendations for Iowa's deer policy. The group reached consensus on 16 recommendations.

The committee determined that current seasons and regulations are appropriate to manage Iowa's deer population however they recommend that where herd management goals have not been met, that the department should keep all options available, including new harvest strategies to quickly achieve goals. It recommended more frequent surveys of hunters, producers and other stakeholders on deer damage and desired population levels.

It also recognized that the HUSH program is a vital component of Iowa's deer management program and should have funding to pay the actual cost of processing the deer. The committee supports making permanent the three additional temporary wildlife depredation staff.

The committee advised the DNR to work closely with the DOT to stay current on techniques to reduce deer vehicle crashes and with the Department of Agriculture to develop information to help Iowa producers reduce deer damage.

Other recommendations included finding ways to connect landowners with hunters willing to hunt their property and to improve access to private land for hunters willing to harvest does. Another recommendation was to ban the practice of feeding or baiting deer.

Finally, the committee recommended that the DNR meet annually with this group and additional stakeholders to review progress on the issues identified in the report needed to successfully manage Iowa's deer population for all Iowans.

The one issue the committee did not meet consensus on was to allow the DNR to have the authority to set all deer quotas.

Randy Taylor, of Reasnor, represented the Iowa Bowhunters Association. Taylor, who has been bowhunting deer in Iowa for more than 30 years, said when the meetings first began that he felt it was one sided against the hunter. But as time went on, people listened to each other and to the information at each meeting. Members were given assignments to gather information that they had to report on in the following meeting and, Taylor said, the committee members did a great job.

"I thought it was a really good process," Taylor said. People voted on what they thought for the recommendations and the committee accomplished what it set out to do, he said.

William Beers, with the Iowa Farm Bureau, said he was pleased to be a part of the legislature's interim deer study advisory committee, and hoped to continue working on developing the implementation steps for the recommendations in the coming year, but emphasized there is more work to be done.

Beers said he look's forward to working with the department to develop a pilot program using an ad hoc committee to allow landowners a more equitable share of the economic benefit of deer hunting, land access, and management.

"In addition, we need better information on the economic impacts of deer in Iowa. The impacts deer are having on field crops, vegetables and produce for farmers' markets, and property damage need attention, too," Beers said.

"We need to have more discussion of harvest success and results for each type of license. For example, do we only increase the number of antlerless resident licenses in a

given gun season? How do we get more hunters to use these licenses successfully? Or do we work to increase the numbers of successful hunters in one or both gun seasons? Do we need a longer gun season or seasons? These are questions that deserve more thoughtful examination,” Beers said.

Committee appointees included the Iowa Farm Bureau, Iowa Conservation Alliance, Iowa Farmer’s Union, Iowa County Conservation Boards, Iowa Insurance Institute, Iowa DOT, Iowa Environmental Council, Iowa Woodland Owner’s Association, Iowa Sierra Club, Iowa Nursery and Landscape Association, Iowa Bowhunters Association, Iowa Meat Processors Association, Iowa Department of Economic Development, Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship, Iowa Rep. Henry Rayhons, Iowa Rep. McKinley Bailey, Iowa Sen. Dennis Black, Iowa Sen. Mark Ziemann, and Ken Herring, chair, Iowa Department of Natural Resources.

The entire report is available at www.iowadnr.gov, click on wildlife, then on deer.

Media Contact: Willie Suchy, supervisor, wildlife research section, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 515281-8660.

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BUILDINGS FROM FORMER GIRL SCOUT CAMP REMODELED AS FAMILY CABINS

HAMBURG, Iowa - Two years worth of renovation, restoration and upgrades will be unveiled to the public beginning April 15 when three family cabins at the WaShawtee Unit of Waubonsie State Park begin hosting visitors. The buildings were all part of the former Girl Scout camp, 60 miles south of Omaha/Council Bluffs.

The DNR will have an open house from 2 to 4 p.m. on April 11 when the public can tour the newly renovated family cabins as well as two camping cabins.

“These cabins are absolutely gorgeous,” said Angela Corio, landscape architect with the Iowa DNR’s State Parks Bureau. “None of these buildings originally had plumbing and some didn’t have electricity. It was a lot of work to bring them all up to date, insulate, install new windows and doors and finish the interiors.”

The three family cabins will be open year-round with heat and air-conditioning. All have a kitchen, bathroom, covered deck, and stone fireplace. There is a three-bedroom that sleeps eight and a two-bedroom which sleeps six, both of which rent for \$85/night. The studio family cabin rents for \$60/night and sleeps two.

In addition to family cabins are two camping cabins. These have been available for rent for the last year and offer more of a “roughing it” experience, with a privy and water hydrant right outside the door (no indoor plumbing). They are very spacious with stone fireplaces, bedrooms, refrigerator, microwave, heat and air-conditioning. Open year-round, the two-bedroom camping cabin rents for \$50/night and the one-bedroom for \$35/night.

By Memorial Day there will be three more camping cabins available. These cabins are smaller two and one-bedroom units, but offer air conditioning, a refrigerator and a microwave.

“Each of these cabins sits alone on a ridge or forest edge, nestled in nature with fabulous views. They have so much history with generations of girls experiencing the outdoors and now will be available for new family experiences,” Corio said.

For large gatherings such as family reunions, graduations and wedding receptions, the former Nature Center building is available for rent at \$40 per day on the weekend and \$20 per day during the week. Plans are underway for remodeling this facility in the near future.

Visitors to the former Girl Scout camp will also notice a new road through the addition. The road took more than a year to build and now connects Waubonsie to the WaShawtee Unit. The camping cabins are accessible through the campground and family cabins through the picnic area in Waubonsie.

Reservations for the cabins and Nature Center can be reserved up to one year in advance are currently accepted by contacting the park office at 712-382-2786. Beginning in late summer, reservations can be made through the reservation center online at www.reserveiaparks.com or by calling the hotline at 1-877-IAPARKS Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. The call center is not open on weekends or state holidays.

Media Contact: Waubonsie State Park staff, Kevin Thorne or Matt Moles, at 712-382-2786.

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TWO FAMILY TROUT EVENTS COMING TO DES MOINES AREA APRIL 4

ANKENY – Two Des Moines area lakes will host a free family trout fishing day on April 4. The events are scheduled for Summerset Stat Park, between Des Moines and Indianola, and for the DMACC Campus Lake, in Ankeny.

The event at Summerset State Park is sponsored by the Warren County Izaak Walton League, Warren County Conservation Board and the Iowa DNR. Registration begins at 11 a.m. and the Warren County Izaak Walton League will provide a free lunch from 11 a.m. until noon. Children may register to win door prizes.

The DNR will be stocking rainbow trout at noon. There will be a limited amount of fishing poles and tackle available for participants who do not have any equipment.

The event at DMACC Campus Lake in Ankeny is sponsored by Des Moines Area Community College, Des Moines Izaak Walton League, Central Iowa Anglers and the Iowa DNR. Registration begins at 11:30 and trout will be stocked around noon.

Sportsman’s Warehouse is providing door prizes and parking will be available on campus lots.

Both events are free, but participants aged 16 and older must be properly licensed and have a current trout fee. Children fishing with a properly licensed adult are not required to pay the trout fee, but their catch is counted toward the five fish daily limit.

Children may purchase a trout fee and have their own daily limit, but children fishing without an adult must pay the trout fee.

For more information, contact Ben Dodd, fisheries biologist, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 515-432-2823.

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ANNUAL PRAIRIE CHICKEN DAY OFFERS UNIQUE PUBLIC VIEWING

By Lowell Washburn
Iowa Department of Natural Resources

Regardless of what you're doing right now, I want you to drop everything, go to your calendar, and circle Saturday, April 11. That's the date for the sixth annual Greater Prairie Chicken Day at southern Iowa's Kellerton Grasslands Bird Conservation Area near Mt. Ayr.

I know it's a ways for some of you to drive, but if you have even a casual interest in wild birds or Iowa's prairie heritage, you'll find the trip to be more than worth the effort. Easy to find, the booming grounds are located two miles west of Kellerton on Highway 2 and one mile south on 300th Ave. There's ample parking and viewing is wheelchair accessible. Spotting scopes, early morning refreshments, and good conversation are provided free of charge. Excellent lodging is available at the newly constructed My. Ayr Inn.

"It's a show you don't want to miss," says DNR Wildlife Biologist, Chad Paup. "Although people can arrive at any time, the best viewing begins at daylight and usually continues until about mid-morning.

"This is our only public prairie chicken booming ground and there's nothing else like it anywhere in Iowa," says Paup. "It's an event where Iowans can come and be virtually guaranteed the chance to observe and hear wild prairie chickens as they display and conduct their annual spring ritual. It's like looking back in time to a glimpse of what Iowa was."

For a preview of what you'll see and hear, visit www.prairiechicken.org.

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PRAIRIE BOOMERS OFFER UNIQUE GLIMPSE INTO IOWA HERITAGE

By Lowell Washburn
Iowa Department of Natural Resources

It's still pitch black when the prairie chicken booming ground stirs to life. The lack of visibility doesn't seem to matter though. This is one annual outdoor performance

that never waits for sunrise. As soon as the morning's first chickens sail in and touch the ground, Act I of The Spring Ritual begins.

Somewhere on the dark prairie out front, the first male begins his dance. The bird bows and then, in a cadence too rapid to follow, begins to stomp both feet in blurring succession. The result is an audible tattoo that immediately quickens to an intense drum roll. The force of the action causes the chicken to spin like a feathered wind up toy.

But the best of the show is yet to come. With feet still pounding, the bird bows again and begins to pump air into its leathery, orange neck sacs. Once the chicken's neck is fully inflated, the prairie song begins. It is like no other. Eerie, weird, mournful, haunting. Once heard, the unique sound will be forever burned into your memory to be replayed time and again.

The chicken's initial booming does not go unnoticed by other early arrivals. In a fit of intense jealous rage, a nearby male suddenly rushes the dancer. Beak to beak, toe to toe, the birds quickly square off. With hackles raised, the challenge begins. But neither bird is willing to back down. Within seconds the cackling confrontation escalates to where both males are leaping straight into the air while audibly assaulting its opponent with beak, wing, and claw.

There's good reason for all this aggression. For greater prairie chickens, spring booming grounds [more properly called leks] are the very essence of species survival. Although all adult males boom and dance, only the most dominate birds are allowed to occupy the lek's center stage. This is where the females will eventually come to be courted.

Time flies and before long the eastern sky becomes tinged with the orange and reds of a new dawn. As light increases, the boomers display with increasing vigor. Here, amidst the seeming chaos of booming, sparing, and retreating, the daily pecking order is reestablished. It's an age old scenario. Dominant males to the center. Younger, more inexperienced birds to the outside.

By now the lek has become an amplified cauldron of sound as each bird does his best to out compete rivals. On a crisp morning, the cooperative booming can be heard for a mile or more in all directions. One can only imagine the wall of sound that once greeted the spring sunrise as tens of thousands of greater prairie chickens boomed and danced across pre-settlement prairie landscapes.

Suddenly, and without fanfare, a lone female appears on the hilltop's horizon. The males acknowledge her presence and the booming escalates to near hysteria. The hen pauses to briefly survey her surroundings. Satisfied that she has become the absolute center of attention, the bird gracefully strides toward the center of the lek.

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FORMER CAMPER ENJOYING SKILLS LEARNED AT OUTDOOR JOURNEY FOR GIRLS

AMES – Leah Clark had her first experience in a canoe when she was a 12 or 13 year old camper at Outdoor Journey for Girls. Now 20, Clark owns a kayak and says it was the experience at Outdoor Journey that began her interest in paddling.

“I had always been an outdoorsy girl,” she said. “But this was the first time I had canoed; first time I shot a bow.”

Iowa’s Outdoor Journey for Girls camp introduces outdoor skills to 12 to 15 year old girls of all backgrounds and knowledge levels where they have an opportunity to try things hands-on under the watchful eye of the instructors.

The three day, two night workshop teaches a variety of outdoor skills, including canoeing, orienteering, fishing, archery, shooting rifles/shotguns, conservation, water safety, camping, game care, trapping, fish identification and fish cleaning and cooking.

The second day is devoted to certifying the girls in Iowa’s hunter education program.

“If I had the opportunity and the time, I would definitely go back and work with the girls on the activities on a regular basis,” she said.

Clark, now a student at Iowa State University, said she can remember trying so many different things and that if one activity was not of interest to a girl, that there were other things they would likely enjoy.

“When we went through it, there were girls from all backgrounds and we all got along,” Clark said. “I still have my shirt from the camp that all the girls signed and I still wear it.”

The 2009 camps are scheduled for June 10 to 12 at Springbrook Conservation Education Center, near Guthrie Center, July 14 to 16 at Black Hawk County’s Hickory Hills Park, and Aug. 5 to 7 at Springbrook. The July and August camps fill rather quickly so early registration is encouraged. More information is available on the Web at www.iowadnr.gov, then click on Camps and Workshops under Additional Information on navigation bar on the left side of the page. Then scroll down to OJ – Outdoor Journey for Girls.

Outdoor Journey for Girls began in 1993 with the purpose of offering girls a similar experience to outdoor camps already in place for boys, and so far, more than 2,000 girls have gone through the camp.

For information on the workshop, contact Donise Grygierczyk at 515-205-8709. In **southwest** Iowa, contact Shawnel Richter at 712-249-2844. In the **Dubuque** and **Bellevue** area, contact Stephanie Penniston at 563-340-4528. In **Waterloo**, contact Lori Eberhard at 319-269-6705. In **northwest** Iowa, contact Amy Johnson at 712-732-3096 or 712-225-1177, or Ginger Walker at 712-225-6709. In **southeast** Iowa, contact Andrea Evelsizer at 319-325-4222 or Jackie Gautsch at 319-205-8581.

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RESCUE IOWA’S PRAIRIES AND CELEBRATE EARTH DAY

Iowa volunteers are invited to rescue prairies throughout the state to celebrate Earth Day 39. This is the 10th annual Prairie Rescue Event.

Volunteers of all ages will help restore prairie at approximately 15 sites throughout Iowa. Tasks vary by site and range from cutting invasive species to hand-planting native seed.

Not only is citizen involvement beneficial to the community, it is crucial for the land upon which we live. More than 150 years ago, prairies covered 80 percent of the land in Iowa. Today only 0.1 percent of native Iowa prairie remains. In order to save what is left, humans must now manage these prairies by removing invasive species and performing other jobs once handled naturally by prairie wild fires and grazing bison or elk.

In the words of Aldo Leopold, “The first precaution of intelligent tinkering is to keep all the parts.” The Prairie Rescue gives Iowans an opportunity to help save the remaining pieces of our prairies.

Children and adults, individuals and groups can get involved at one of many Prairie Rescue sites across the state. Each site is sponsored by public and private conservation groups, such as the Iowa Prairie Network, Loess Hills Preservation Society, Center for Prairie Studies at Grinnell College, several Iowa County Conservation Boards, the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation, and the Iowa Department of Natural Resources.

If you are interested in hosting a Prairie Rescue Event, contact Whitney Davis at the Iowa Department of Natural Resources at (515) 281-6271 or Whitney.Davis@dnr.iowa.gov . For a listing Spring 2009 Prairie Rescue sights, visit the Prairie Rescue website at www.inhf.org/rescue2009.htm or the DNR’s volunteer calendar at <http://idnritb6.dnr.state.ia.us/kolweb/eventViewYear.do> .

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NATIVE TREES AND SHRUBS AVAILABLE FOR SPRING

DES MOINES - More than 2 million trees and shrubs were planted in Iowa for conservation efforts on private and public lands last year. The Iowa State Forest Nursery and several private Iowa nurseries have good supplies of Iowa grown conservation tree and shrub seedlings available for spring planting.

“There are good supplies of white, red, bur and swamp white oak, black walnut, silver maple, white pine, dogwood, black chokecherry and 31 other species of conifers, hardwood trees and shrubs available from the State Forest Nursery,” said State Forest Nursery Manager Roger Jacob.

These conservation trees and shrubs are bareroot seedlings from locally collected, Iowa seed, and range in size from 8 to 24 inches tall. State Forest Nursery prices remain unchanged from last year, ranging from \$0.25 for an 8 to 16-inch tall conifer such as Norway spruce, to \$0.45 for a 17 to 24-inch tall hardwood tree or shrub such as the oaks. Plants are sold in lots of 100 and a minimum order of 500 plants is required.

For people who do not have the land to plant 500 trees and shrubs but are interested in planting their small acreage for wildlife habitat, the State Nursery offers four

special wildlife packets of 200 trees and shrubs for \$90. A create-a-packet which contains 50 plants each of four different species of your choosing. A Turkey packet designed in cooperation with the Iowa Chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation contains 50 each of gray dogwoods, bur, pin, and white oak for mast production. A Pheasant packet contains 50 each of red cedar, wild plum, ninebark and gray dogwood. A Quail packet contains 100 wild plum and 100 gray dogwood. The Songbird packet is perfect for that odd corner in a larger backyard contains 2 bur oak, 2 white pine, 4 wild plum, 4 chokecherry, 4 gray dogwood and 4 serviceberry and sells for \$20 which includes shipping.

To order conservation seedlings from the State Forest Nursery call 1-800-865-2477 M-F 8-4:30 PM or go to www.iowadnr.gov/forestry/catalog.html Credit card orders are accepted.

Those interested in establishing Farmstead Windbreaks should consider contacting a private Iowa grown nursery that offers larger conifers or transplants in smaller quantities and they can go to www.iowatreeplanting.com for a listing and contact numbers.

For more information, contact Roger Jacob or Kandy Weigel at 1-800-865-2477 or 515-233-1161.

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BIODIESEL 101

POLK CITY – The Iowa DNR Trails Program is hosting a workshop on how to make your own diesel fuel from used restaurant fryer oil from 9 a.m. to noon, April 7, at the Trails Building at Big Creek State Park, just north of Polk City. The workshop is open to everyone.

The workshop will discuss the Trails Program’s interest in “walking the walk” of protecting our natural resources and share how easy it is to produce biodiesel of this type for small fleet production or for home use.

Iowa DNR Director, Richard Leopold, along with other DNR staff will be on hand.

To find the Trails Building, do not turn right into the entrance of Big Creek State Park but head west across the bridge and turn left onto NW 125th Ave. Proceed a few hundred feet until you see mailboxes on the right and a park office sign on the right. Turn left down the drive of pine trees. Enter the compound where you will find the Trails Building just beyond the two park buildings you see as you enter. The Trails Building is a new brown building with a green roof. An AmeriCorps sign is in the window and the building number is 8796.

If you have difficulty finding the Trails Building, call 515-868-2593 or 515-250-2190.

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