

HOOK HARMONY

Fishing—The Escape Elixir for Pent-up People

With hundreds of serene lakes, tranquil ponds and 71,000 miles of mellow waterways—we've got you covered with peaceful places to refresh and wet a line!

BY SHANNON HAFNER

PHOTO BY ISTOCK.COM

Connect with Nature

DICKINSON—Enjoy beautiful sunsets at Big Spirit Lake, Iowa’s largest natural lake. Awesome yellow perch fishing coming in 2021. Top-notch walleye fishing with 14-inch fish and bigger, too.

GUTHRIE—Catch lots of 10-inch smallmouth bass while floating or wading the Middle Raccoon River, dotted with stone left by glaciers. Use lead head jigs tipped with a half a crawler in pools, around rocks, or below riffles. Catch-and-release regs protect fish from Lennon Mills dam down to the Redfield dam.

JACKSON—Along twisting roads through hill country of the Driftless, Mill Creek near Bellevue has some of Iowa’s best trout fishing and most beautiful scenery. Rainbow trout are

stocked at the Big Mill Creek Wildlife Management Area in rural Jackson County and Felderman Park in Bellevue. Catch wild brown trout in upper Mill Creek.

LINN—Palisades-Kepler State Park is popular for paddlers on this Cedar River stretch past limestone bluffs and huge sandbars. Excellent white bass, walleye and northern pike fishing below the old lowhead dam. Shovelnose sturgeon and channel catfish action picks up late spring and summer. Hiking trails, camping, rock climbing, playground and boat ramp. The park, hit hard by the derecho is closed. Check iowadnr.gov for potential 2021 re-opening details.

LUCAS—Admire thousands of red bud trees in bloom at Red Haw State Park mid- to late April. Great bluegill fishing with 8.5- to 9-inch fish. Redear sunfish up to 11 inches. Loads of quality largemouth and crappie. Easy bank fishing with



LEFT SIDE PHOTO COURTESY OF KIRSTIN DAVIS. ABOVE RIGHT COURTESY OF CHAD BOEHLJE. BOY AND BAITSHOP BY BRIAN BUTTON



ABOVE: Valerie Boehlje of Pella sent this image after landing a big, beautiful rainbow trout last July on Patterson Creek in Allamakee County. “I caught her on a mayfly pattern Thunderbug Spinner and we successfully released it, safe and sound back in to the stream,” she says.

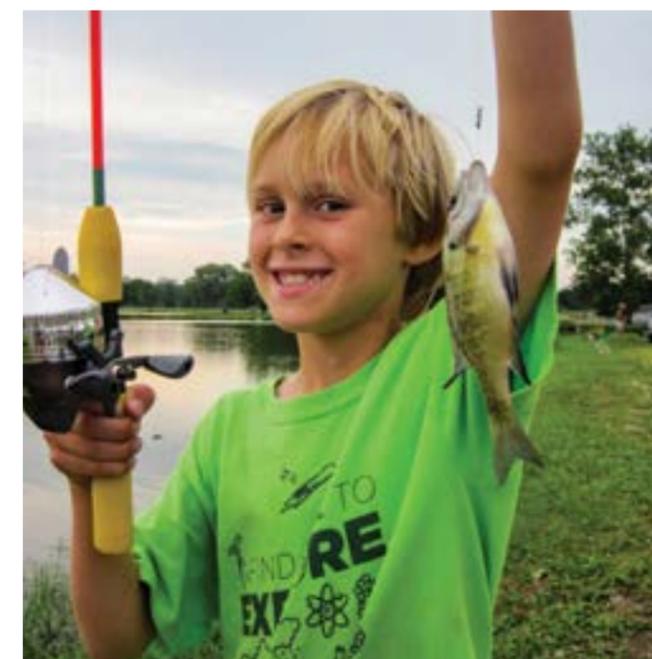


jetties and shore accesses. Shady campground overlooks the lake, picnic areas and multi-use trail. Enjoy white blooms of water lilies June through September.

MONROE—A family favorite, Lake Miami is one of the fastest improving lakes with 9-inch bluegills and bigger. Catch 18-inch largemouth and crappie that best 10-inches. Campground, cabins, trails, playground, lodge and captive elk.

WEBSTER—Explore Brushy Creek Lake’s coves, creek arms and scattered islands. Cast where habitats meet, such as weed lines that run into standing timber next to rocky points. Home to very large walleye, abundant largemouth, monster catfish and 40-inch-plus muskie. Catch bluegill, crappie and yellow perch with small jigs around submerged timber or edges of weed lines. Surrounded by public lands with great wildlife habitat. Equestrian campgrounds and riding trails.

WORTH—Silver Lake is mostly undeveloped, for an “out in nature” feel. Fabulous bluegill with lots of 8- to 10-inch fish. Abundant 15- to 17-inch largemouth after renovations in 2013. Two jetties and a concrete ramp for easy access. Stay at the county park on the north shore.



Get Away and Relax

BENTON—Stay in a beautiful lakeside cabin at Hannen Lake, southwest of Blairstown.

Kids revel in catch and release 8- to 12-inch bass (15-inch minimum). Catch lots of 7- to 9-inch bluegill and occasional crappie. Excellent access with piers and jetties.

CRAWFORD—Tucked in the hills near Boyer, Rigglesman Pond offers good bass and panfish. Bring a kayak to explore narrows. Listen for turkeys and look for morels.

DALLAS—Boaters find good panfishing at rural Beaver Lake. Abundant crappies run 7- to 9-inches, with some 10- to 11-inchers at this small lake full of timber. Strong

bluegill numbers with 7- to 9-inch fish.

DELAWARE—Walk-in or float the Maquoketa River below Delhi dam down to Hopkinton for the region's best smallmouth, up to 18 inches. Use jigs, crankbaits, spinners and flies. The first two miles are catch and release for largemouth and smallies.

DICKINSON—Escape to quiet Center Lake in the heart of Iowa's Great Lakes. Good population of walleyes and crappies with some bluegills.

KOSSUTH—Water's Edge Nature Center at Smith Lake will keep the family busy. Catch spring crappie and bluegill over 9 inches. Find big largemouth with an 18-inch length minimum. Campgrounds, fishing docks,

playgrounds, boat ramp, jetty, hiking trail and beaches.

LEE—Hike into White Oak Lake in Shimek State Forest west of Donnellson. Catch 8- to 9-inch bluegill and 9- to 10-inch redears. Fish the dam, or float a bellyboat to remote shores. Hook 9-inch bluegill at nearby Shagbark Lake. Enjoy massive white pines in the forest. Campground and hiking trails.

LINN—Climb the observation tower at Pinicon Ridge Park for valley views, or tour the 5-acre Alexander Wildlife Area. Cast for smallmouth, walleye and northern pike in the Wapsipinicon River. Hiking, camping, playground and boat ramp. Canoe and kayak rentals.

TAYLOR—Reserve a cabin or campsite at Lake of Three

Fires State Park, the region's most scenic. Catch 9- to 11-inch crappie with some over 12 inches, largemouth over 20 inches and lots of 8- to 9-inch bluegills. Antique shops and golf course nearby.

VAN BUREN—Picturesque Lake Lacey at Lacey-Keosauqua State Park is surrounded by hiking trails. Fishing from a boat or kayak gives more access. Look for bluegills over 9 inches and 10-inch redear sunfish along vegetation.

WINNESHIEK—Hike a mile and a half through upland prairie and bottomland vegetation at South Pine Creek. Catch native brook trout up to 13 inches and wild browns. Narrow in places, pools are deep, wide and challenging with clear water.



PHOTO BY ISTOCK.COM



Catch the Big One!

ALLAMAKEE—Experienced paddlers appreciate tight curves, obstacles, drops and fast water in the Yellow River, Iowa's longest coldwater trout stream. Fishing by canoe or kayak is the only legal way to fish without landowner permission, but many public accesses are available. Brown and rainbow trout are stocked. Find trophy trout in deep, wide pools or riffles, undercut banks and eddies. Hook a smallmouth and suckers near Effigy Mounds National Monument.

CERRO GORDO—Clear Lake offers many accesses. Hook Master Angler-sized yellow bass over 10 inches. Drift or cast jigs in 6 to 8 feet of water late April through early June. Boating is best for large fish, but wading and dock fishing also works.

MARION—Large white bass and hybrid striped bass provide excitement at Red Rock Reservoir. Watch for gulls hovering over surfacing baitfish and toss silver or white lures into the frenzy. Fish below the dam February through May. Explore the Whitebreast arm and marina for Master Angler-sized crappie.

SHELBY—Bluegills are big and plentiful in Prairie Rose Lake southeast of Harlan. Catch spawning fish off gravel beds and rock reefs early May to mid-June. Print a fish structure map at iowadnr.gov/fishing/where-to-fish.

UNION—Find trophy-sized bass, yellow perch and channel cat at Twelve-Mile Creek Lake east of Creston. Try jigs along tree piles or weed lines for bass. Elusive 12-inch jumbo yellow perch await. Drift a jig tipped with a nightcrawler along flats in the main basin or near points for perch. Use stinkbait or nightcrawlers along rocky areas for catfish.

WASHINGTON—Lake Darling keeps improving after lake renovations. Excellent spring crappie bite (many top 10 inches) near rip-rap. Catch 8-inch-plus bluegill and lots of 18-inch bass. Easy access with mile-long accessible fishing trail, revamped jetties and fishing dock. Stay the weekend at the park's year-round cabins.



Family Bonds

AUDUBON—Hook family memories at Littlefield Lake with recently added yellow perch and walleye. Catch 15- to 20-inch-plus channel cats, 8-inch plus bluegill and 14-inch largemouth. Great access, lake-side camping, beach, playground and trails.

DAVIS—Several miles of trails at Lake Wapello State Park run through prairie, woodland and by wetlands. One of Iowa's premier largemouth spots, with good bluegill (6- to 9-inch) and very good crappie (up to 11 inches). Shaded picnic areas, swimming beach, family cabins and a revamped, rebuilt campground with lake access.

DUBUQUE—Mississippi River Pools 11 and 12 are known for great bass, bluegill, catfish, crappie, drum, sauger and walleye. Best fished by boat as shore fishing is limited. In March and early April, tailwater action at Lock and Dam 11 peaks for sauger and walleye. Catch channel cats and drum with nightcrawlers in main channel borders during summer. Enjoy historic Dubuque's eateries, shops and river museum.

FRANKLIN—Hike the two-mile trail around Beeds Lake State Park to see the historic dam. Several jetties and a pier. Catch 7.5-inch bluegill, 10-inch crappie, a few 10-inch yellow bass and quality largemouth. Enjoy a relaxing, shaded picnic. Spend a night in the campground.

JOHNSON—At Lake Macbride State Park, catch bluegill, crappie, walleye, channel cat and occasional trophy muskie. Easy access to limestone shores, jetties and an ADA fishing pier. Iowa's only lake to catch the prized Kentucky spotted bass. Camping, swimming beach, hiking and biking trails, lodge and boat rental, picnic areas and playground.

LYON—Find great bluegill and crappie at Lake Pahoja. Fast bass action. Camping, cabins, trails, beach, playground. New nature center opens this year.

MUSCATINE—Start a day at Discovery Park Pond, near

the arboretum and Fuller Park. Try a chunk of nightcrawler under a bobber for 'gills or chicken liver for cats. Catch bass with a variety of lures, from rubber worms and topwaters to Beetle Spins. Try flashy spinners for stocked trout; dough baits, corn or other scented baits work best after trout settle in. Learn about Iowa fish, reptiles and amphibians at the Environmental Discovery Center. Hiking/biking trails, playground and picnic shelters.

SAC—Camp and hike at Black Hawk State Park where kids can catch lots of largemouth at the lake, renovated in 2012. Cast off of Ice House Point or fish inside the new enclosed fish house for buckets of 10-inch crappies. Perch and walleye fishing is excellent if timed right. About half the shore is public. Park buildings and structures built by the CCC make fun history lessons. A paved bike trail runs 30 miles to Carroll.

UNION—Three-Mile Lake has great access with 10 jetties. Catch walleye up to 22 inches, bluegill up to 9 inches, 10-inch crappie and all sizes of largemouth up to 20 inches. Chance to hook a blue catfish over 26 inches and 8 pounds. Fun for all boaters with ski zone and no-wake zone with flooded timber for anglers. Swimming beach, picnic areas, campground, cabins and shooting range.

WARREN—Camp and paddle at Lake Ahquabi State Park near Indianola. Great access with pier, jetties, trails and Hooper Lake across the road. Catch bluegill, redear sunfish and crappie mid-April through May. (Lake will be drained this summer for an improvement project.) Explore Annett Nature Center. Attend outdoor events at the Izaak Walton League, near main entrance.

WINNESHIEK—Trout Run is a perfect fishing spot for all ages and skills. Stocked weekly April through October with rainbow trout. Entice a wild brown to a home-made fly or lure. Wander hatchery grounds, feed fish, walk through a prairie, picnic or explore the 11-mile multiuse trail circling Decorah. View the world-famous Decorah eagles.

PHOTO AT LEFT COURTESY JESSE BAINIER, ABOVE RIGHT BY ISTOCK.COM



Terra Park, Johnston

Pass on Your Love of Fishing

BLACK HAWK—Abundant smaller bluegill and black crappie at George Wyth Lake are great for kids or newbies. Easy access from three jetties and floating pier. Fish near shore with a small hook, nightcrawler and bobber May and July.

CARROLL—Haul in bluegill and crappie at Swan Lake State Park from nine jetties, enclosed fish house or shore in late May and early June. Good catch rates and a solid population of 2- to 4-pound largemouth. Watch wildlife, including swans and bison, and stop at the nature center for park and lake views. Paved bike trail around the lake runs to Black Hawk State Park.

CASS—Lake Anita is one of Iowa's best all-around lakes and a new family-friendly accessible pier puts you on bluegills, crappies and largemouth. Put a worm under a bobber, toss and retrieve small jigs or rig a rubber worm.

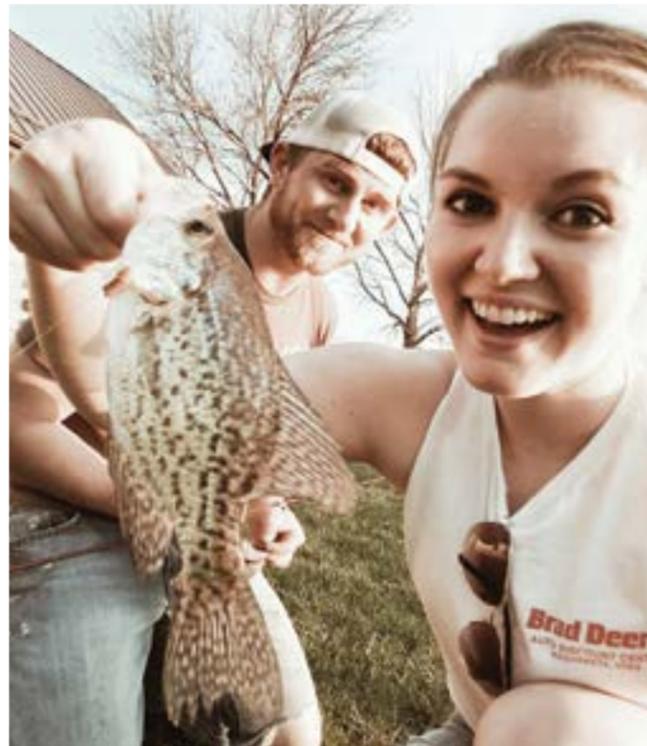
DICKINSON—Easy panfishing at East Okoboji Lake. City parks and state areas have dock access.

FAYETTE—With striking limestone bluffs, Echo Valley State Park boasts beauty and trout at Glovers Creek and Otter Creek. Stocked weekly April through October with rainbow trout (Otter Creek gets too warm for July and August stocking.) Easy access for limited mobility anglers.

MADISON—Catch lots of 7- to 9-inch bluegill at Criss Cove County Park Pond south of Winterset. Easy access with jetties and boat ramp. Use a worm under a bobber along jetties.

POLK—Keep kids and new anglers busy catching early spring rainbow trout at Terra Lake in Terra Park in Johnston. Easy pier access for bluegill and largemouth. Playground, paved trail, restrooms and picnic tables.

WASHINGTON—Catch lots of bluegill, largemouth and channel cat year-round at Marr Park Pond. Lucky anglers catch a holdover rainbow trout stocked last fall. Nature center, shelters, playground, trails and campground.



Seek Adventure and Feel Invigorated

ALLAMAKEE—Wild brown trout thrive in the unnamed creek to the Mississippi River running through Lansing Wildlife Management Area. This narrow stream has steep drops, riddled with beaver dams and wet meadows downstream. Be prepared to walk through dense understory and marshy willow thickets. Use light tackle and short rods.

APPANOOSE—Rathbun Lake hybrid striped bass fishing is some of the fastest action around with great chances to catch fish pushing 10 pounds. Many 17- to 21-inch fish await, some over 24 inches challenge any tackle. Best fished by boat for lots of fish in a short time.

BLACK HAWK AND BREMER—Catch a bit of everything on the Cedar River. Try live bait near log jams with current below Waterloo down to Linn County for channel cat, drum, shovelnose sturgeon, smallmouth and walleye. Above Waterloo, the Cedar is known for channel cat and walleye, but northern and smallies are here, too. Many spots are shore accessible.

BOONE—Great fun for all at Don Williams Lake with a

campground, beach, playground, trails, golf course and cabins. Catch plenty of crappie and bluegill. Dock fishing is good, especially late April and May during spawn. From a boat, drift jigs down lake center during the mid-summer bite.

CERRO GORDO—It takes many casts with good-sized baits to hook 40- to 50-inch muskellunge at Clear Lake. Spring and fall are best for these toothy giants. Fish surveys confirm healthy muskie numbers.

CLARKE—Troll West Lake Osceola lake points and dam outlet for feisty wipers. Try jigs or crankbaits.

LINN—A 2017 restoration at Pleasant Creek Lake improved water quality. New rock piles, reefs, spawning areas and hundreds of trees upped fish habitat and angling. Excellent chance to catch elusive muskie using big spinners or big topwater baits around the dam, weed edges and rock reefs. Many 35- to 42-inch muskies with 50-inch monsters. There is

a 40-inch minimum length limit on muskie.

PALO ALTO—Keep busy at Lost Island Lake catching walleyes, yellow perch, yellow bass, bluegills and largemouth. Years of northern pike stocking is yielding trophy-sized fish.

POTTAWATTAMIE—Explore new depths and drop-offs at Lake Manawa from recent dredging. Walleye and wiper fingerlings stocked each year produce trophy (24-inch-plus) fish. Action starts after ice out, continues into spring and heats up again in autumn.

SCOTT—Fishing is stellar at Lost Grove Lake with lots of bass and chances to catch a lunker. Hook bluegill, redear sunfish, largemouth, channel cat, walleye and muskellunge. Try spinnerbaits, rubber worms, worm harnesses and jigs tipped with paddletail bodies. Explore trails or get off the beaten path walking the perimeter. 🐟

Reel Fun in Metro Neighborhoods

- Find fishing fun near home with easy access to stocked lakes and ponds in city parks and neighborhoods using the mobile-friendly, interactive Community Fishing Atlas at iowadnr.gov/FishLocal. With more than 40 new destinations added since 2017, 23 more are planned by 2022. Local fishing boosts community pride with safe, convenient places to fish in fun areas close to home.

The DNR's Community Fishing Program helps cities improve fishing in their ponds with tools and tips to solve common problems like excess aquatic plants, small fish and undesirable fish species. Fisheries biologists monitor fish populations and stock as needed to aid anglers. Parking and paved paths around ponds help anglers quickly get to the fish—essential when taking kids.

Helpful Tips:

- Look for Fish Local signs on publicly accessible waters.
- Fishing licenses required for those 16 and older. Buy licenses online at GoOutdoorsIowa.com and download promptly, print at home or store on your phone.
- Harvest regulations posted at many areas.
- Check weekly fishing reports at iowadnr.gov/Fishing/Fishing-Reports.
- Be mobile. If you don't catch fish after a few minutes, move to another spot.
- Carry a sack and gloves to pick up trash and leave the area better than you found it.
- If the parking lot is full, pick a new location or come back early morning or evening. Keep at least 6 feet of distance between others.
- Bring lures from home instead of buying bait to minimize contact.
- Bring hand sanitizer and wash hands often.

Gear to Get Started:

- Use a small hook (size 6 or 8), bobber (size of a nickel and no larger than a quarter) and worms to get started. Needle-nose pliers work well for hook removal and use a stringer for fish if you choose to harvest any for a meal.
- Bring sunscreen, sunglasses and a brimmed hat for sun protection.
- Bring a camera. Preserve the memory of your kid or grandkid hooking their first fish with a First Fish certificate at iowadnr.gov/FirstFish.



DOCK FISHING PHOTO BY BRIAN BUTTON, KIDS IN PFDS OF TRACY FAHRION