



IOWA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Iowa DNR News

Conservation and Recreation

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History, habitat and location collide to make Waterman Prairie a true Iowa treasure



Covering more than 2,000 noncontiguous high quality acres in four counties, Waterman Prairie Wildlife Area attracts academics, school groups, birders, hunters, historians and those who enjoy a scenic drive on Iowa's county roads. Photo courtesy of the Iowa DNR.

Southerland, Iowa - The area that has become Waterman Prairie has been important for people and wildlife for more than 1,000 years. It's an area that native tribes called home and where Inkpaduta, Wahpekute Dakota Indian chief of the Spirit Lake massacre and Little Big Horn fame, hid from the military on his way west.

"There's so much history here," said Chris LaRue, wildlife biologist with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR). "It's easy to see why it was a place where natives had lived and where remnant prairie could be found today."

The steep slopes, rolling hills and diverse habitat that made it desirable back then still exist today. Covering more than 2,000 noncontiguous high quality acres in four counties, Waterman Prairie Wildlife Area attracts academics, school groups, birders, hunters, historians and those who enjoy a scenic drive on Iowa's county roads. The area is home to the Whittrock Indian Village State Preserve, remnant tallgrass prairies and a number of wildlife species listed as either threatened or endangered. It's on the migration route for birds, including falcons and eagles and all species of waterfowl.

Given its location on the migration route as well as its importance among local bird species, Waterman Prairie was designated as a state Bird Conservation Area in 2015. During the dedication ceremony, it was recognized for its importance for nesting and migratory grassland and savanna birds, as well as other animals like the northern prairie skink, least weasel and pollinators including migrating monarchs and resident longhorn bees and bumblebees.

"I've been here when thousands upon thousands of migrating monarchs are clinging on oak trees," LaRue said.

Locally, quality hunting at Waterman Prairie has been a tightly held secret, but word is getting out. Its growing reputation for producing trophy deer, supporting a strong turkey and pheasant population and as popular destination among mushroom hunters has caught the attention of nonresident hunters who call LaRue looking for any nugget of information to help them bag a trophy stag or a limit of roosters.

"This place is being used by locals because access to private land is difficult in this area because everyone wants to keep their spot to hunt their trophy deer. It's also being used by people coming from Sioux Falls to Sioux City to Fort Dodge for the excellent habitat," LaRue said. "The economic benefits are being enjoyed by the local businesses."

Local farmers lend a helping hand

The Iowa DNR often partners with local producers to help manage wildlife areas through haying, thistle control, managing food plots, crop rotation and grazing. At Waterman Prairie, they've contracted with two producers, including Brian Tjossem, of Royal, who signed on through the beginning farmer program.

"It gave an opportunity to me when I came back from college to add some acres to the family operation and to add some diversity," Tjossem said. "I appreciate the opportunity to farm it."

Although farming the Waterman Prairie area was more challenging than he had expected given its soil variability and steep hills, the scenery more than makes up for it.

“It’s hard to beat the views,” he said comparing it to his relatively flat farmland in Clay County. “But it’s a little nerve wracking coming up to 100 foot drop offs.”

Tjossem’s initial four year contract from 2014 was renewed in January.

“It’s just a great area for wildlife. Just beautiful,” said Tjossem who hunts pheasants on Waterman Prairie. “It’s hard to believe (Waterman Prairie) can be that close to where you live and have that scenery and wildlife.”

The DNR also works with local cattle producers to include grazing in certain areas of Waterman Prairie as a habitat management tool.

Partnerships are key

Multiple partners have contributed to creating and managing the area. The Iowa DNR, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, O’Brien County Conservation Board, The Nature Conservancy, Buena Vista County Conservation Board, Cherokee County Conservation Board, O’Brien County Sportsmans Club, Cherokee County Pheasants Forever, Clay County Pheasants Forever, O’Brien County Pheasants Forever, the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation and the Iowa chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation.

The Waterman Prairie Bird Conservation Area was made possible by partnerships among O’Brien, Clay, Buena Vista, and Cherokee County Conservation Boards, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, The Nature Conservancy, Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation, Iowa Audubon, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Prairie Lakes Audubon Bird Club, and Iowa DNR.

Etcetera...

Waterman Prairie has a wealth of archeological resources, including being attached to Whittrock Indian Village State Preserve. The six acre preserve is one of 11 archeologically important sites in Iowa. The DNR works closely with the state archeologist to preserve the area.

“This area is a treasure not only from a resource point of view, but from a historical point of view and we work closely with state archeologist to protect and preserve this historically rich area,” said LaRue. “It’s easy to see why it was identified as a place where natives and remnant prairie would be found. It’s too steep to plow.”

Research on the Poweshiek skipper and Dakota skipper has been done on this complex.

One parcel of the Waterman complex is part of the National Wildlife Refuge system. While the entire Waterman Prairie area is open to hunting, the refuge portion has a few different rules to operate under.

Waterman Prairie was one of the first locations where otters were released as part of the reintroduction effort. Trumpeter swans have successfully nested on a wetland on the southernmost tract of Waterman Prairie in northern Cherokee County.

Waterman Prairie has a growing following of photographers, especially when prairie flowers are in bloom.

Horseback riding and snowmobiling on the area is not allowed.

Media Contact: Chris LaRue, Wildlife Biologist, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 712-330-4543.

Nodaway Valley teacher recognized for outstanding fishing program



Norma McCutchan, life science teacher at Nodaway Valley High School in Greenfield, is the 2019 recipient of the Brass Bluegill award from the Iowa Department of Natural Resources *Fish Iowa!* program.

McCutchan started using *Fish Iowa!* in 2012 to introduce animal behavior and Iowa's natural resources to her sophomore classes, and share her love of the outdoors.

"Many of my students aren't aware of the nature around them, activities available outdoors, and the impact we have on an ecosystem," said McCutchan. "I'm an outdoors

person and want to share my experiences and passion for nature, and hopefully spark an interest in fishing.”

McCutchan’s students study Iowa fish species found in their regional lakes, and characteristics of the fish. They learn about different fishing baits and lures and make a hypothesis about which lure or bait they could use to catch a specific fish species. McCutchan reminds her students that it’s not always about catching when they go fishing, they need to be aware of lake conditions and weather.

After the students’ research is complete, they put their knowledge into practice during a fish outing.

“I want students to experience the outdoors and joys of fishing,” McCutchan said. “Many of my students have never gone fishing, don’t know how to cast a rod, bait a hook, tie a hook/lure on their line, or remove a fish after it’s caught. I get the privilege to teach them these skills.”

McCutchan was presented her award at the Natural Resources Commission meeting in Des Moines on August 8.

The Brass Bluegill award has been presented each year since 1996 to an instructor who has established an outstanding local program that exemplifies the goals of *Fish Iowa!*

Media Contact: Barb Gigar, training specialist, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 515-494-3891.

Pheasant, quail, rabbit, dove and partridge harvest all increased in 2018

Pheasant hunters’ harvested nearly 320,000 roosters in Iowa during the 2018 season, which was the highest harvest total since 2008. In 2017, hunters harvested an estimated 221,000 roosters.

“The 2018 roadside survey showed our pheasant population was 39 percent higher than in 2017, so we were expecting an improved pheasant harvest,” said Todd Bogenschutz, upland wildlife biologist for the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR). “We’re glad to see the increase in hunter success, but based on our pheasant population, we should see harvest numbers in excess of 500,000 birds. The primary factor holding our harvest totals down is the lack of hunters. Even with a positive forecast last year, we saw a four percent drop in the number of pheasant hunters.”

The harvest and participation estimates are based on the results of a random survey of licensed hunters following the 2018-19 hunting season.

Iowa’s quail harvest followed the same trend. Hunters harvested an estimated 47,000 quail last year, which was the highest total since 2007. The quail harvest increase was also expected based on the August roadside survey.

“For comparison, we had a similar quail population in 1995, but five times the quail hunters. They harvested an estimated 250,000 quail,” he said.

The survey estimated hunters harvested 123,000 rabbits, nearly 81,000 squirrels and nearly 119,000 doves.

The Iowa DNR is in the process of conducting its annual survey of upland game. The August roadside survey covers more than 6,500 miles of routes driven on gravel roads at dawn on mornings with heavy dew. Hen pheasants will move their broods to the edge of the gravel road to dry off before they begin feeding, which makes them easier to count. The statewide survey takes place between Aug. 1-15.

The August roadside survey has been conducted over the same routes since 1962. In addition to pheasants and quail, the survey collects data on partridge, cottontails and jackrabbits. Results will be posted online at www.iowadnr.gov/pheasantsurvey by Sept. 10. Iowa's pheasant season begins Oct. 26.

Deer licenses on sale Aug. 15

Licenses to pursue Iowa's world class deer herd go on sale Aug. 15 at more than 700 license sales agents statewide and online at www.iowadnr.gov.

Resident Iowa hunters may purchase one any deer license for a gun season, one any deer license for archery season and one county specific antlerless deer only license.

The number of county specific license quotas for antlerless deer only has changed for 24 counties – 20 counties quotas increased and four county quotas decreased. Hunters may purchase one antlerless only deer license until Sept. 15, then as many as they want until the season ends or quotas fill.

Iowa DNR to host open house about Springbrook State Park

The Iowa Department of Natural Resources State Parks Bureau is hosting an open house to collect comments on future planning and improvements at Springbrook State Park. The open house is scheduled from 4:00 - 7:00 PM on Monday, September 9, 2019 at the Mary Barnett Memorial Library, 400 Grand Street in Guthrie Center.

For more information, contact the Springbrook State Park office at 641-747-3591.

Space available in upcoming hunter education classes

Hunter Education Classroom courses are offered by knowledgeable and certified volunteer instructors and Iowa Department of Natural Resources Conservation Officers. Classroom courses are typically 12-15 hours in length and are held over 2 to 3 sessions

(days). In order to receive certification, a student must attend all sessions and pass the final exam.

Iowa law requires that anyone born after January 1, 1972 must be certified in hunter education before they are eligible to purchase an Iowa hunting license.

Upcoming Hunter Education Classes

Aug. 15, Morrison, Grundy County Heritage Center

Aug. 15, Marshalltown, Izaak Walton League

Aug. 15, Columbus Junction, American Legion

Aug. 17, Stratford, Izaak Walton League Boone Valley

Aug. 17, Hamburg, Dovel's Den

Aug. 19, Algona, Kossuth County Conservation Board

Aug. 20, Ames, Izaak Walton League

Aug. 20, Clinton, Izaak Walton League

Aug. 20, Britt, West Hancock Ambulance Service

Aug. 22, West Des Moines, Raccoon Park Nature Center

Aug. 22, Rockford, Floyd County Conservation Board Fossil and Prairie Center

Aug. 24, Aurelia, Aurelia Shelter House

Aug. 24, Montrose, Lee County Conservation Board

Aug. 24, Bloomfield, Izaak Walton League

Aug. 24, Vinton, Izaak Walton League

Aug. 24, Fairbank, Fairbank Gun Club

Aug. 24, Decorah, Northeast Fox and Coon Club

Aug. 24, Muscatine, Muscatine County Conservation Board Environmental Learning Center

Aug. 26, Humboldt, ISU Extension and Outreach Office

Sept. 4, Independence, Buchanan County Wildlife Association

Sept. 5, New Hampton, Fredericksburg Sportsmans Club

Sept. 5, Iowa City, Fin and Feather

Sept. 5, Palo, Palo Outdoors

Sept. 5, Knoxville, Marion County Sportsmans Club

Sept. 7, Blue Grass, Oak Hills Gun Club

Sept. 7, Lenox, Lenox Fire Station

Sept. 7, Swisher, American Legion

Sept. 7, Aplington, Aplington Community Center

Sept. 7, Sigourney, Keokuk County Sportsman Club

Sept. 7, Muscatine, Muscatine County Conservation Board Environmental Learning Center

Sept. 10, Marcus, Grace Methodist Church

Sept. 11, Exira, Audubon County Conservation Board

Sept. 14, Quimby, Peterson Family Farm

Sept. 17, Dyersville, Dyersville Fire Department

Sept. 19, Dubuque, E.B. Lyons Interpretive Center, Mines of Spain

Sept. 21, Waterloo, Hawkeye Community College

Sept. 23, Polk City, Butch Olofson Shooting Range

Sept. 27, Davenport, Adventure Church

Sept. 28, Fayette, Volga Valley Conservation Club

Oct. 5, Waterloo, Hawkeye Community College

Oct. 15, Ottumwa, Izaak Walton League

Oct. 26, Center Point, Center Point Fire Station

Oct. 29, Bellevue, Bellevue State Park Lodge

For more information on these and other hunter education opportunities, go to www.iowadnr.gov/huntered