



IOWA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

# Iowa DNR News

Conservation and Recreation

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**July 19, 2022**

- [Grasslands, wetlands showcased at Lower Morse Wildlife Area](#)
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## Grasslands, wetlands showcased at Lower Morse Wildlife Area



*Lower Morse Wildlife Area, in Wright County. Photo courtesy of the Iowa DNR.*

Walking south past the sunflower field to the crest of the gently rolling hill provides visitors of a view with a diverse 1,850-acre wetland and rolling prairie complex in northern Wright County. As far as the eye can see, its rolling hills, prairie and small wetlands that make up the popular Lower Morse Wildlife Area.

The area has been a work in progress over the years through tree and shrub removal, prairie planting and restoring wetlands.

“We’re managing this area as a prairie wetland complex which requires regular disturbance to keep trees and shrubs from taking over,” said TJ Herrick, wildlife biologist for the Iowa Department of Natural Resources’ Clear Lake Unit.

The goal of the disturbance – prescribed fire and targeted and limited grazing by a local cattle producer – is to create and maintain high quality grassland habitat to benefit a diverse wildlife community.

The prairie changes through the summer, showcasing different plants along the way. Spiderwort, round-headed bush clover, prairie blazing star, black-eyed Susan, rattlesnake master, mountain mint, compass plant, lead plant and white indigo can all be seen. Remnant native prairie was uncovered on a portion of Lower Morse after ash and cottonwood trees were removed from an old pasture.

“That area had never had a plow on it, so we thought there was a good chance we’d find remnant prairie and we did,” he said.

The diverse prairie supports bobolinks, grasshopper sparrows, eastern meadowlarks, Bell’s vireos, Dickcissels and more. Sandhill cranes and trumpeter swans have returned to nest near the wetlands. Six cranes, with their distinctive grinding calls, could first be heard, then seen flying low over a hill to the east.

“Lower Morse is important for grassland birds and was designated as a Bird Conservation Area in 2009. It’s also important for migrating waterfowl,” he said.

Duck hunters have options here – walk in to hunt the small, shallow potholes or launch a boat at the Mitigation Marsh or Morse Lake, once it refills, for the larger water experience.

“It’s a premier duck hunting area and year in and year out, it’s great for pheasant hunting. It’s a place that generates a lot of phone calls from nonresidents,” Herrick said.

The sunflower fields generate interest, too. But before attracting hunters and doves, it will serve as a background family and engagement pictures and for senior photos (not to mention a wave of ‘selfies’).

### **Wildlife on Lower Morse**

The Multi Species Inventory Monitoring program within the Wildlife Diversity program has had crews on Lower Morse complex in 2008, 2009, 2010, and 2021, to survey for the wildlife species that calls the area home.

Crews have identified various wildlife species that are considered in greatest conservation need, including American bittern, belted kingfisher, black tern, broad-winged hawk, brown thrasher, Blanchards cricket frog, tiger salamander, common yellowthroat, eastern kingbird, grasshopper sparrow, Henslow’s sparrow, northern harrier, monarch butterfly, northern prairie skink, plains pocket gopher, and the least weasel, to name a few.

### **Morse Lake restoration**

The 90-acre Morse Lake suffered from poor water quality due to resuspension of silt and the lack of aquatic vegetation caused by a high carp population. The lake was lowered to eliminate the fish and to restart the aquatic vegetation. A new water control structure was installed that provides more control over water level management and the ability to simulate natural water level fluctuations.

The project included a downstream wetland restoration and a fish barrier below the wetland to prevent fish from re-entering the wetland and Morse Lake.

The lake water level is low but once it returns to crest, it will be stocked with a mix of northern pike, yellow perch, largemouth bass and bluegill. The improved water quality will benefit waterfowl and other wildlife and the new lake phenomenon will produce catchable sized fish by the end of the second year.

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## Learn to Hunt program opens registration for Small Game Workshop

The Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is offering a program to teach skills needed to hunt, field dress and cook small game, such as rabbits and squirrels, to adults who have little to no small game hunting experience.

The workshop will be held on Aug. 13, from 5 to 8 p.m. at the Amana Sportsman's Club, in Amana. Participants will learn basic strategies for hunting small game such as proper equipment, where to hunt, safe shooting practices, and how to field dress, butcher and cook them.

The workshop also includes shooting techniques and time on the gun range for those looking to improve their shooting skills.

"This workshop will provide participants the skills and knowledge necessary to begin hunting small game, including techniques to field dress and cook this lean and healthy protein," said Jamie Cook, program coordinator with the Iowa DNR.

The workshop is designed for participants 18 years of age and older. The cost is \$25. For information on the workshop and to begin the registration process, go to <https://tinyurl.com/22ehv3p8>. Space is limited so be sure to register right away.

The program is provided through a partnership with the Iowa DNR, Woods and Waters Project and Amana Sportsmans Club. It is part of a national effort to recruit, retain and reactivate hunters due to the overall decline in hunting and outdoor recreation.

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