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**Oct. 14 Iowa Outdoors**

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**Press Releases from the Iowa Department of Natural Resources**

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# IOWA OUTDOORS

IOWA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES | CONSERVATION AND RECREATION DIVISION

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**[MEDIA CONTACT for the Pheasant articles is Todd Bogenschutz, Upland Wildlife Biologist, Iowa**

Department of Natural Resources, 515-432-2823 ext. 111]

## PHEASANT OPENER PROSPECTS ARE GOOD

Iowa pheasant hunters should see more of what they came for, as they step into the field this fall. More pheasants.

A strong rebound in August roadside counts of Iowa's most popular game bird has buoyed expectations, heading toward the October 25 opener.

"It's not the 'good old days,' but hunters will see noticeable improvement," says DNR pheasant biologist Todd Bogenschutz. "We have the best pheasant numbers since 2008. People are telling me that more birds are flushing; that they are hearing more crowing and cackling out there."

Counts this summer averaged 17.4 pheasants per 30 mile survey route, up 151 percent from last year's 6.9...an all-time low. Of the nine regions monitored, eight had increases ranging from 102-290 percent. Only northeast Iowa showed no change.

Bogenschutz says drought conditions across the past two summers probably kept pheasants in the fields on August mornings, rather than pushing up to road edges, to escape heavy dew. That may have kept many from being tallied on the 200 gravel road routes surveyed. Hunters harvested 10,000 *more* pheasants in 2013, despite the record low counts.

So, where do you find them, on a fall morning?

"The best habitat will hold birds; good winter cover, good nesting cover, too. Hunters should be happy hunting those areas, over just decent nesting cover," predicts Bogenschutz. "Hunt around the best habitat, and you will be pleasantly surprised. Talk to the farmers where you will be hunting. Ask what they have seen while harvesting the crops."

With a better bird outlook, the numbers of hunters should climb, too. Last year, only 41,000 pheasant hunters were in the fields.

"If word gets out of the early season success expected, we could see 60,000 hunters this fall," predicts Bogenschutz. "We could have a harvest of 200,000 to 300,000 birds."

Early in the season, standing crops are going to be a factor.

"Harvest is running a little behind. The season is starting a couple days earlier, too," reminds Bogenschutz. "That could be a challenge for hunters, until the corn is out. Our counts were up; hens with broods were way up. There will be a lot of young roosters, who aren't wise to the ways of the wild, yet."

Hunting hours for Iowa's pheasant seasons are 8 a.m. until 4:30 each day. The daily limit is three rooster pheasants. The season closes on January 10.

*Sidebar*

### **Programs Available to Add More Pheasant Habitat**

Improving the living conditions for Iowa pheasants is at the heart of the Pheasant SAFE habitat program that is designed to give pheasants a kitchen, bedroom and living room altogether in one spot to maximize pheasant survival and reproduction.

Iowa received 50,000 acres for the program that was divided between primary and secondary counties, based on pheasant counts from 2002-06. Around 27,500 areas remain in the primary pheasant counties, (see the SAFE link at [www.iowadnr.gov/habitat](http://www.iowadnr.gov/habitat)).

"We would like to keep the momentum going and keep our pheasant numbers increasing and this program is one way to accomplish that," said Todd Bogenschutz, upland wildlife biologist for the DNR. "But we can't ask for more acres in the program until the initial allotment is gone."

Pheasant SAFE is one tool to help boost the bird population. Bogenschutz said Iowa received \$3 million through the USDA-NRCS Voluntary Public Access-Habitat Incentive Program to benefit the DNR's Iowa Habitat Access Program (IHAP). IHAP plans to add more than 20,000 acres of improved habitat on private land and make those lands available to hunters in the coming years.

He said the Wildlife Bureau is also working with Pheasants Forever to improve pheasant/quail habitat on 40-50 wildlife management areas through the Enhance A Wildlife Area program.

### *Sidebar*

#### **Better Bird Numbers Could Attract Former Hunters**

Iowa's August Roadside Survey pheasant count was the highest since 2008 and that good news has people talking.

"These are our best bird counts in six years and people are telling me they're seeing and hearing birds more than in recent years," said Todd Bogenschutz, upland wildlife biologist for the Iowa DNR. "It's not the good old days, but it's the best we've had in a few years."

Bogenschutz said he's hoping the increase is enough to bring back hunters who dropped the sport when the population hit an all-time low in 2011.

In 2008, there were around 86,000 resident pheasant hunters. In 2013, that number had fallen to 41,000. Nonresident hunters had fallen from a peak in the 1990s of 60,000 to 5,700 in 2012, rebounding to 6,300 in 2013.

"Pheasants have some buzz right now, but is it enough buzz to bring some of the former hunters back? We'll have to see," he said.

### *Sidebar*

#### **Youth Season October 18-19**

Iowa's higher pheasant counts mean this will be an excellent year to take kids pheasant hunting, said Todd Bogenschutz, upland wildlife biologist for the DNR.

"We have a lot of young birds that haven't been hunted yet so there could be a good opportunity for kids to be successful," Bogenschutz said.

One issue could be the late harvest. Bogenschutz suggested youth hunters target habitat near areas where beans have been harvested.

Youth hunters age 15 and younger are allowed to harvest one rooster each day of the two day season. Shooting hours are 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. and the youth must be accompanied by a properly licensed adult. Participants must comply with the blaze orange clothing requirement.

### *Sidebar*

#### **Looking for Places to Hunt? Start Online**

The Iowa Department of Natural Resources created a hunter atlas showing all areas in the state open to public hunting and included what type of wildlife would be associated with those areas, open seasons and any restrictions.

The interactive hunter atlas is on the front page in the links at the lower left on [www.iowadnr.gov](http://www.iowadnr.gov).

“The atlas allows hunters a bird’s eye-view of the area and allows them to print maps, if they want,” said Todd Bogenschutz, upland wildlife biologist for the Iowa DNR.

Another resource is the Iowa Habitat Access Program (IHAP), where private landowners receive assistance to improve habitat on their land in exchange for opening the property for hunter access. The program has added 8,100 acres where hunters can access private property.

Site maps are available at [www.iowadnr.gov/ihap](http://www.iowadnr.gov/ihap) showing boundaries, which species would be most likely attracted to the habitat and the location of a comment box where hunters can leave their thoughts on the program.

Walk-in public hunting through IHAP is available between September 1 and May 31.

“We need hunter input on this program so each site has a drop box and survey cards to collect hunter comments. They can either drop the cards in the box or mail them from home,” said Kelly Smith, with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources Wildlife Bureau who manages the program.

Areas are posted with signs, are regularly patrolled by Iowa DNR conservation officers.

“Hunters should respect private property, stay on the land enrolled in the program and pick up after themselves,” Smith said. “This program is only available because landowners were willing to participate in it.”

## **THINK SAFETY BEFORE OPENING DAY**

Hunters heading to the field for the opening weekend of pheasant season are encouraged to review safe

hunting practices before they head out.

Megan Wisecup, hunter education administrator with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources, said hunters should get reacquainted with the techniques used to hunt pheasants – be sure to walk in a straight line and know where members of the hunting party are at all times, especially in low visibility areas like terraces, tall switch grass and standing corn.

“Go through the zones of fire with each member of the hunting party, talk about avoiding target fixation and swinging on game,” Wisecup said. “Wear plenty of blaze orange especially on the upper one third of your body. We are encouraging hunters to wear more blaze orange than the minimum required. The goal is to be seen by other hunters.

“The top pheasant hunting incidents all are related to not being seen. The shooter swings on a rooster, the victim is out of sight of the shooter or the rooster flew between the shooter and the victim.”

Wisecup said safety also extends to the canine companions.

“Avoid low shots to prevent injuring your hunting dog,” she said.

“The hunting plan and safety practices are all part of a responsible hunt. The goal at the end of the day is for everyone to return home safely.”

### **Pheasant hunting related incidents**

2013: 1

2012: 3

2011: 3

2010: 2

2009: 3

### **Tips for a Safe Hunt**

- Iowa law requires hunters to wear at least one of the following articles of visible, external apparel with at least 50 percent of its surface area solid blaze orange: hat, cap, vest, coat, jacket, sweatshirt, shirt or coveralls.
- Hunters should stay in communication with each other and to stay in a straight line while pushing a field. Conservation officers have investigated a number of incidents where hunters have been in a semicircle and had been shooting towards one-another.
- Discuss the hunting plan that spells out how the hunt will take place, each person’s role in the hunt and where each person will be at all times.
- Know exactly where standers will be located, especially when hunting standing corn or tall switch grass. Too often the standers get shot by the pushers as they near the end of the field and the birds begin to flush.
- Make sure to unload the gun when crossing a fence or other obstacle to avoid it accidentally

discharging.

- Properly identify the target and what is beyond it. This will be especially important for the next few weeks if hunting in fields that still have standing corn.
- If hunting with a dog, never lay a loaded gun against a fence. Hunting dogs are usually excited to be in the field and could knock the gun over causing it to discharge.
- Share the hunt. Take someone new along to help keep Iowa's great hunting tradition alive.

**MEDIA CONTACT: Megan Wisecup, Hunter Education Administrator, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 515-238-4968, or Jeff Barnes, Recreation Safety Officer, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 515-290-4907.**

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## FALL TROUT FISHING EXCITEMENT

Fall and winter trout stocking south of Hwy. 20 began in 2004 when South Banner Lake received 2,000 fish and at each stocking event since, the hatchery truck has been greeted by throngs of anglers eagerly anticipating the first strike.

From that initial successful release, the DNR has expanded cool weather trout stocking from Council Bluffs to Burlington. With each new location comes a new group of followers greeting stocking trucks with rods in hand.

"This is about as a sure thing as there is with fishing," said Joe Larscheid, chief of fisheries for the Iowa DNR. "These are fun fish to catch and they are aggressive right off the truck. People are getting limits quickly once the fish are stocked."

The fall trout stocking events are listed on the DNR's online calendar of events at [www.iowadnr.gov/calendar](http://www.iowadnr.gov/calendar)

"These trout are easy to catch using simple, inexpensive tackle. We usually have a family friendly fishing event associated with the stocking to help novice anglers be successful," Larscheid said.

Bringing trout to cities and towns offered a unique fishing experience to Iowans who might not normally travel to northeast Iowa to fish for trout. The experiment has been a success.

"We've seen a steady increase in the number of trout fees sold since the first trout was released in South Banner Lake in 2004. We are less than 300 sales shy of breaking the all time record for trout," he said.

Anglers are required to have purchased a trout privilege in addition to having a valid fishing license to

fish for or possess trout. There is a five fish per day limit with a possession limit of 10. Children may fish under their adult's license but may only take one daily limit. The child may have their own limit if they purchase a trout privilege.

**MEDIA CONTACT: Joe Larscheid, Chief of Fisheries, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 515-281-5208.**

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REAP: 25 Years of Enhancing and Protecting Iowa's Resources

## **REAP FUNDING PARAMOUNT FOR STEPHENS STATE FOREST**

REAP funding makes enjoyment of Stephens State Forest possible. Located in south-central Iowa, Stephens State Forest comprises more than 15,000 acres, divided into seven units that are dispersed over five counties: Lucas, Clarke, Monroe, Appanoose and Davis.

Originally purchased in 1949 as a National Forest by the U.S. Forest Service (USFS), Stephens was sold to the State of Iowa in 1964 after cheaper land prices — spurred by less agricultural development in Missouri — lured the USFS into instituting a National Forest in that state. Stephens State Forest is administered by the Iowa Department of Natural Resources, and REAP is much to thank for its development, quality, maintenance and accessibility.

The Lucas, Whitebreast and Woodburn Units are contiguous and offer most of Stephens Forest's developed amenities. Year round recreational activities include fishing, picnicking, camping, hunting, hiking, equestrian riding, snowmobiling, cross-country skiing, mountain biking and wildlife watching.

The Woodburn Unit has more than six miles of backpacking trails and five backcountry, pack-in campsites. Whitebreast Unit offers two lakes, three equestrian campgrounds, a group-camp area and 25 miles of paved multi-use trails. Lucas Unit has two small lakes and three primitive campgrounds, as well as 10 miles of trails and is served by an all-weather road.

Cedar Creek, Chariton, Thousand Acres and Unionville Units do not have developed recreational facilities, but offer excellent hunting, hiking and wildlife watching opportunities in one of Iowa's premier wooded environments.

Stephens Forest receives annual REAP funding from two major portions of the program, Land Management and Open Spaces.

REAP Land Management funds have gone towards timber stand improvement, tree planting, post-harvest projects, gravel for trails, signage (trails, informational/educational, boundary, etc.), fencing materials, chemicals for invasive species control and eradication, building of sediment retention structures to control erosion, and printing of trail maps and brochures.

“We contract out the work we can’t accomplish with our own staff and pay for that with REAP funds — we use the land management funds to implement our forest management plan,” said area DNR forester Jessica Flatt.

REAP Open Spaces funds paid for new siding on the Forestry Headquarters building, flood damage repairs on ponds, trails and roads (used as a match for FEMA funds and as stand-alone funding) and new parking lot and public accesses.

“Many of these projects would go unfunded without REAP. Our operations budget has been quite variable over the years and REAP helps us keep up on our forest management activities and facilities repairs,” explained Flatt.

In its 25 years, REAP has benefited every county in Iowa by supporting 14,535 projects. REAP has funded these projects with \$264 million in state investments, leveraging two to three times the amount in private, local and federal dollars. Collectively, these projects have improved the quality of life for all Iowans with better soil and water quality; added outdoor recreation opportunities; sustained economic development; enhanced knowledge and understanding of our ecological and environmental assets, and preservation of our cultural and historic treasures.

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## MICK KLEMESRUD Information Specialist

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