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April 29 Iowa Outdoors

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IOWA OUTDOORS

IOWA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES | CONSERVATION AND RECREATION DIVISION

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: APRIL 29, 2014www.iowadnr.gov | [facebook.com/iowadnr](https://www.facebook.com/iowadnr) | twitter.com/iowadnr | [pinterest.com/iowadnr](https://www.pinterest.com/iowadnr)

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PEAK CAMPING SEASON BEGINS MAY 1

Preparation has been underway for a few weeks now. Campers anxious to get a jump on the camping

season after a long winter dealing with one polar vortex after another are going through their equipment, checking supplies so they are ready when the time comes.

The time has come. The 2014 camping season is finally here.

Iowa state parks are going through the final stages of prep work before hosting more than 700,000 campers and 14 million visitor days this year. And like most years, there will be some new things for them to see.

Visitors to Wilson Island, the beach area at Big Creek and Lake Darling state parks will see significant changes this summer.

Wilson Island, north of Council Bluffs, has been closed since the spring of 2011 due to damage from the Missouri River flooding. Visitors should expect the park to look much different than the one before the river left its banks.

The extensive cleanup included removing about one-third of its towering cottonwood trees killed by the floodwaters. The park has received a complete makeover: a new campground, park office and shower building. The DNR installed a new entrance on the north end of the park to provide access to the campground designed to remain open during flood events.

“Our neighbors demonstrated their resiliency when they cleaned up and rebuilt their homes and their patience and support for this project has been important each step of the way,” said Todd Coffelt, chief of state parks for the Iowa Department of Natural Resources.

Wilson Island is expected to reopen in early summer. It will be rededicated in July.

Big Creek, north of Des Moines, will showcase a completely new beach area with three large shelters, 10 beachside cabanas and new rest rooms. Big Creek State Park will be rededicated in June.

Lake Darling, southwest of Washington, is expected to open midsummer and will be rededicated in September.

Lake Darling will be a new park at an old address. The entire park – and lake – has been renovated and will feature a new campground, shower building, universally accessible fishing trail, roads, lake, dam and more.

“We are counting down the days when Lake Darling will reopen. This park will be a magnet drawing visitors from across southeast Iowa and beyond,” Coffelt said. “We had such excellent support from the park friends group who was willing to take on fundraising and any other tasks we needed help with.”

Other parks will be receiving facility improvements this summer in the form of new latrines and trail bridges, but most of the construction is scheduled for after Labor Day, to minimize the impact during the recreation season.

New playgrounds will be going in at Waubonsie, Wilson Island and AA Call and expanded at Lake Anita in early summer.

Look for interpretive programs at Lake Ahquabi, Ledges, George Wyth, Pikes Peak, Bellevue, Mines of Spain, Lewis and Clark and in parts around the Iowa Great Lakes. The visitors' center is now open at Lewis and Clark. Check the DNR's events calendar at www.iowadnr.gov for more information.

Honey Creek Resort State Park also offers interpretive programs. New for 2014, the resort will offer paddle boards to its long list of outdoor items available to rent. Its RV park, cottages and hotel offer comfortable accommodations along the north shore of Lake Rathbun.

Ten parks will have concessions. Backbone, Beeds Lake, Big Creek, Lake Ahquabi, Lake Macbride, Rock Creek, Viking Lake, Lake Manawa, Springbrook and Pikes Peak will have snacks, firewood and other concession items. Backbone, Beeds Lake, Big Creek, Lake Ahquabi, Lake Macbride, Rock Creek and Viking Lake will have boats available to rent.

CHECK EQUIPMENT

Before heading to the campground, campers should spend some time going through their equipment to make sure it's in working order.

Check tents for holes, make sure tent poles are not cracked, the lantern still works and new batteries are packed. RV owners should check their breakers, make sure the tires are properly inflated, roof seams are sealed and their propane tanks are filled.

Check the first aid kit, the toolbox and cookware.

It's better to find problems at home rather than after arriving at the campsite. After all, last fall was a long time ago.

SITES FOR HOLIDAY WEEKENDS GOING FAST

Options are few for Memorial Day Weekend: Marble Beach and Honey Creek. The rest of the reservable campsites in state parks are either spoken for or only have one or two remaining.

Campsite options for July 4 are much better, but don't wait too much longer before selecting one. Parks that filled for July 4 are Backbone, Clear Lake, Elinor Bedell, Emerson Bay, George Wyth, Gull Point, Lewis and Clark, Maquoketa Caves, Stone and Viking Lake. Campers wanting to spend the holiday at those parks will need to arrive days early to secure a non-reservable site.

Parks close to filling are Bellevue, Green Valley, Ledges, Lake Anita, Lake of Three Fires and McIntosh Woods with only a reservable handicap accessible site remaining. Walnut Woods, Lake Macbride, Lake Manawa and Pleasant Creek each have one electric site; Nine Eagles has two electric and one handicap site. Lake Wapello has three and Black Hawk has four and one handicap site. Wapsipinicon has five electric sites remaining.

Parks with higher numbers of available reservable electric sites are Honey Creek, Pine Lake, Brushy Creek, Pikes Peak, Beeds Lake, Marble Beach, Pilot Knob, Lake Keomah, Volga River and Springbrook.

Not every campsite is available on the reservation system. Parks maintain between 25 and 50 percent of the electric and non electric sites as non-reservation sites, available for walk up camping.

Information on Iowa's state parks is available online at www.iowadnr.gov/parks including links to the reservations page.

CAMPGROUND ETIQUETTE

- Be a good neighbor. Observe quiet hours and pick up after yourself
- Don't burn trash – only firewood

- Keep pets on a leash and don't leave them unattended
- Get firewood locally to avoid transporting pests.
- Don't bring fireworks

CAMPING TIPS

- Keep track of the weather and have a plan in case of severe weather
- Plan to arrive as early in the day to set up the site, look for potential problems and avoid those areas
- Prepare ingredients for meals before leaving home for less time cooking and more time playing
- Bug spray, sun screen and a basic first-aid kit are must haves
- Check the registration kiosk for activities in the area

FIREWOOD

The Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship requires all firewood sold or acquired in Iowa to have the county and state of harvest location on the label of packages and the delivery ticket for bulk firewood. The rules were added to prevent the spread of invasive species.

The rules only apply to firewood sold and acquired in Iowa.

The rule also requires the Iowa DNR to collect firewood from campers that does not have a label.

MEDIA CONTACT: Todd Coffelt, Chief, State Parks Bureau, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, [515-281-8674](tel:515-281-8674).

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LEAVE WILDLIFE BABIES WHERE THEY BELONG - -- IN THE WILD

It's as predictable as August heat. From border to border, the Wildlife Baby Season has arrived in Iowa. From May until at least mid-June, DNR field offices across the state will be inundated with hundreds of phone calls and scores of deliveries regarding "orphaned wildlife."

Most calls begin with something like, "We were walking in the park when . . .," or "I looked out my

window and saw..." In nearly every instance, the scenario ends with something [or several somethings] being rescued from their mother.

During a typical season, the species will range all the way from baby robins and squirrels to spindly-legged white-tailed fawns. At this time of the year it is not at all uncommon for biologists to discover that complete litters of baby raccoons, foxes, or even skunks have mysteriously appeared on their doorsteps.

Why this happens is no real mystery. From fuzzy yellow ducklings to tiny baby bunnies, nothing appears more cute and cuddly than a wildlife baby. But in reality, most of the wildlife reported to DNR field offices is not really orphaned at all. And while the people who attempt to "rescue" these babies have the best of intentions, they are in fact dooming the very creatures they intend to help.

The babies of most wildlife species leave their nests or dens well in advance of being able to care for themselves. Although broods or litters may become widely scattered during this fledgling period, they still remain under the direct care and feeding of their parents.

For many songbirds, the transition to independence comes quickly and may take as little as four or five days. For other species such as Canada geese, kestrels, or great horned owls, the young and parents may stay in contact for weeks -- even months.

At the beginning of the fledgling period, young birds appear clumsy, dull-witted, and vulnerable. The reason for this is because they really are clumsy, dull-witted, and vulnerable. But as the education process continues, the survivors smarten up fast, while slow learners quickly fade from the scene. Most birds have less than a 20 percent chance of surviving their first year. While this seems unfortunate or cruel, this is a normal occurrence in Nature. In the real out-of-doors, it's just the way things are.

Most mammals employ a slightly different strategy when it comes to caring for their adolescents. Since most mammals are largely nocturnal, the mother usually finds a safe daytime hideout for her young while she sleeps or looks for food. Consequently, it is perfectly normal for the young to be alone or unattended during the daylight hours.

Nevertheless, whenever a newborn fawn or a nest full of baby cottontails or raccoons is discovered by a human, it quite often is assumed that the animals are orphaned. The youngster's fate is usually sealed when it is promptly "rescued from the wild."

Many wildlife babies die soon after capture from the stress of being handled, talked to, and placed into the unfamiliar surroundings of a slick sided cardboard box. Should the animal have the misfortune of surviving this trauma, they often succumb more slowly to starvation from improper nourishment, pneumonia, or other human caused sicknesses.

Whether they are adults or young, all species of wildlife have highly specific needs for survival. "Rescuing a baby from its mother" not only shows bad judgment, it also is illegal.

Observing wildlife in its natural habitat is always a unique privilege. Taking a good photo or two provides an even more lasting memory. But once you've done that, let well enough alone. Leave wildlife babies where they belong -- in the wild.

MEDIA CONTACT: Karen Kinkead, Wildlife Diversity Program Coordinator, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 515-432-2823; or Bruce Ehresman, Wildlife Diversity Biologist, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 515-432-2823 ext. 106.

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WINTER BURN SHOWING UP ON CONIFERS IN IOWA

Conifer trees across Iowa are showing signs of stress from last winter, including browning or bleaching needles, needle loss and some tree death. This condition is known as winter desiccation, or winter burn.

“This past winter may have been one of the colder winters on record, but we still had several days where the air temperature was above freezing and the soil remained frozen. When this happens, trees use the water reserves in their needles but are unable to absorb new water from the frozen soil,” said Tivon Feeley, forest health program leader with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources. “The tree literally runs out of water.”

The symptoms become more apparent as the days warm and tend to be worse on the windward side of the tree. Reports indicate arborvitae, white pine and white fir have moderate to severe damage from winter burn.

Feeley said if the needles on the tree are dead but buds are alive, new plant foliage will replace foliage lost from winter burn. “However, if both the buds and needles are dead the tree will not recover and will need to be removed,” he said.

There is no way to prevent winter burn. However, tree owners can reduce the risk by properly mulching and watering in the fall prior to the tree going dormant. Watering is especially important in drought years.

MEDIA CONTACT: Tivon Feeley, Forest Health Program Leader, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, [515-281-4915](tel:515-281-4915)

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YOUTH TURKEY SEASON SUCCESS

Turkey Number One didn't cooperate, but a second chance tom was just fine for Caelan Johnston.

The 12 year old Cedar Rapids boy bagged a 20 pound gobbler during Iowa's Youth Turkey Season. Set up before dawn in a Benton County blind with his dad, Dan Johnston, they heard one gobbler right off the bat. With the nearest roosting trees about a quarter mile away, though, it was quiet for a couple hours.

Eventually 15 or 20 deer moved toward them. A little later, two turkey hens showed up in the field behind the blind...with a tom following.

"We tried an alarm 'put' to get the turkey to stop and hopefully raise his head for a look around. Instead, he ran off," explains Dan. With such a tough target, Caelan's shot missed.

However, 30 minutes later, their luck changed.

Dan told Caelan they'd try one more call before wrapping up for the morning. In the distance, a gobbler returned.

"I saw a black object, walked right into our clearing," recalls Caelan. "Dad called again; it walked to the right and I shot."

That 25 yard shot dropped the bird. Looking over the 9¼ inch beard and 1 1/8 inch spurs...Caelan had his first trophy tom.

"This was my first year actually shooting. I've gone out with my Dad before, when he hunted. We went out the day before, to shoot a couple rounds and get used to the shotgun kick. That helped a lot," he agreed.

He was one of about 4,000 young hunters, expected to hunt during the early youth season. Youth hunters who did not fill their tags are permitted to hunt—with their adult mentor still alongside—during the regular seasons, which continue through May 18.

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REGISTRATION OPEN FOR POPULAR GIRLS OUTDOOR SUMMER CAMPS

A unique outdoor camp that introduces 12 to 15 year old girls to the fun of the outdoors is being offered three times this summer.

The three day, two night Outdoor Journey for Girls camp teaches girls canoeing and water safety, basic orienteering, fish and wildlife identification, firearm safety and basic shooting, camping and outdoor survival, fishing and more.

Camps are offered June 18-20 at the Conservation Education Center at Springbrook State Park, north of Guthrie Center, July 8-10 at Black Hawk County Conservation Board's Hickory Hills Park, near Dysart, and Aug. 6-8, at Springbrook.

Camps fill quickly so early registration is recommended. The \$125 registration fee covers food, lodging and equipment use. Local Pheasants Forever chapters often provide scholarships to help offset the cost for campers.

Outdoor Journey is sponsored by Iowa Women in Natural Resources, the Iowa DNR and Pheasants Forever chapters.

For a camp brochure, registration form and more information on the camps, go to <http://www.iwinr.com/>.

The popular Outdoor Journey for Girls camp has introduced thousands of girls to the outdoors in a safe and supportive environment.

MEDIA CONTACT: Stephanie Penniston, Outdoor Journey for Girls Coordinator, 563-340-4528.

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SEATS AVAILABLE FOR HUNTER EDUCATION CLASSES

Many hunter education classroom and online/field day courses have seats available. Classes are listed on the Iowa Department of Natural Resources' website at www.iowadnr.gov/huntered along with information on how to sign up.

Classes can fill quickly so anyone needing to take a hunter education class is encouraged to sign up soon.

Iowa law requires anyone born after January 1, 1972 to have successfully completed a hunter education course to purchase a hunting license. Children as young as 11 may enroll in the course, but their certificate of completion will not become valid until their 12th birthday.

Online Only Course Option for Adults

The online only course for adults is designed for Iowa residents 18 years of age or older that have prior hunting and/or firearms handling experience.

The course covers the same material as the classroom course, allowing the student to complete the entire course, including the final test, in an online setting. Certification is received at the successful completion of the online course.

To get started on one of the DNR's approved online Hunter Education courses, go to www.iowadnr.gov/huntered. One of the approved course providers, HUNTERcourse.com, is launching a promotional safety campaign from April 25 to May 5, 2014.

Students who sign up for the online course during the promo, and complete the course by May 9, will save \$5 off the cost of the safety course. Sign up at www.huntercourse.com/usa between April 25 and May 5, 2014.

The discount promotion is valid for both the regular field day online course (11 years old and older) and the adult online option (18 and older).

MEDIA CONTACT: Megan Wisecup, Hunter Education Administrator, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, [515-238-4968](tel:515-238-4968).

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