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Aug. 5 Iowa Outdoors

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IOWA OUTDOORS

IOWA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES | CONSERVATION AND RECREATION DIVISION

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: AUGUST 5, 2014

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1. Lake Darling State Park is Open
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LAKE DARLING STATE PARK IS OPEN

BRIGHTON, Iowa - Lake Darling State Park has reopened to visitors but remains a work in progress as contractors put the finishing touches on a complete makeover of this southeast Iowa park.

The park and its namesake lake have both undergone total renovation in partnership with the Lake Darling Friends Group, local communities, landowners, residents, businesses and the Iowa DNR.

The new campground has fewer campsites but each site was enlarged to include a living area. The renovation included new electrical service to the campsites, two new restrooms and about four miles of new roads through the campgrounds and the rest of the park.

Contractors will be completing concrete work on the fishing trail and around the park office and a few other odds and ends. This fall, the landscaping and seeding will be installed.

Lake Darling will not be on the state park campsite reservation system this year.

"We will have first come first served camping this year," said Merrill Lucas, park manager at Lake Darling. "We've been really busy since reopening. Everybody has really been enjoying it. It would be a good idea to call ahead to check on site availability."

The camping cabins are currently available, too, and this fall, six new year-round cabins will be added to the park.

Named for famed conservationist and Pulitzer Prize winning editorial cartoonist J.N. "Ding" Darling, the park was originally dedicated on September 17, 1950.

A formal grand opening is scheduled for September 17.

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

REAP KEY TO FUNDING THREE MILE LAKE COMPLEX

AFTON, Iowa – Three Mile Lake Recreation Area in southwest Iowa's Union County, serves as a prime example of REAP's power to improve Iowans' quality of life, leverage funds, and provide local revenue.

Three Mile Lake was originally a 300-acre watershed lake for the city of Afton. Drought in 1988-89 created a seven-county public water supply need that encouraged the use of PL566 federal money to build a dam for the local water treatment plan.

That's when John Tapken, now-retired Union County conservation director of 32 years, found inspiration for the much-needed recreational area. Partnering with eight sponsors, all but 34 of the 3,100 acres were bought over the kitchen table.

Deeded to the State of Iowa, signs posted throughout Three Mile indicate that REAP funding played the instrumental role in the recreation area's construction.

Campgrounds include primitive water's edge hike-in sites as well as spacious lake-view 30 and 50-amp modern RV and tent sites. Solely because of REAP, eight 14x18 foot log-frame cabins that sleep six are available year-round. Each comes equipped with self-contained heat/air units, electricity, queen sleepers, fridges, microwaves, picnic tables and fire pits. A larger lakeshore cabin, located on the beach near the boat

ramp, sleeps up to 12 in two rooms and offers a large private deck, stove and all the comforts of home.

Three Mile Lake's Recreation now provides the Union County Conservation Board with more than \$160,000 in annual revenue.

Three Mile's REAP-facilitated, heated, "comfort station" is open 24/7, 365 days a year and includes accessible showers, sinks and flush toilets. It has remained open continuously since 1995. Located nearby, between the cabins and modern campground, lies the heated fish-cleaning station. It is also open 365 days a year and provides fishers and ice fishers alike an all-weather comfort zone complete with stainless steel fish cleaning table and gut-grinder.

REAP funds also benefit Iowa through annual per-capita county allocations. Every county in Iowa receives these funds, and through years of saving Tapken was able to separately REAP-fund the initial \$80,000 beach installation while coordinating with boat ramp and parking lot construction.

"Before the dam was completed, before the lake was even here, we knew where the water line was going to be. DNR and County Conservation worked hand in hand, putting the beach in first so we wouldn't interfere with where they wanted the boat ramps and parking lot; we coordinated in order to utilize facilities that accommodate for more than just boaters," said Tapken. Three Mile's beach has a beach volleyball court and adds the option of spending a relaxing day by the lake in the sun and sand.

The 880-acre Three Mile Lake now contains a choice bounty of muskellunge, walleye, large and smallmouth bass — in addition to the usual run, including crappie, bluegill and catfish. Acres of underwater structures make for some of the best fish habitat in Iowa, while 11 fishing jetties and a wheelchair accessible fishing pier provide shore anglers comfort and convenience.

Hundreds of acres of cover and food plots create a habitat rife with songbirds, waterfowl and upland game. The lake has quickly become a mecca for migrating ducks and geese, and waterfowl hunting is permitted — except for Canada Geese, as Three Mile Lake and the surrounding wildlife area is designated as a Canada Goose Refuge. Whitetail deer and wild turkey abound along with cottontail, squirrel, pheasant and quail.

Three-Mile Lake Lodge is Three-Mile's newest structure, a 36x84 foot log-framed lodge available for rent by the public year-round.

This multi-purpose building has quickly become a popular spot for many different types of activities, hosting wedding ceremonies and receptions, several local school proms, business retreats, reunions, anniversaries, birthdays and banquets.

The upstairs level boasts an impressive 1,800 square-foot main room, complete with dance floor, large deck, full kitchen and restroom facilities. The basement offers a room of similar size, constructed with 8-inch thick concrete walls that allow the space to double as a storm shelter for all 80 campsites and recreational areas.

"All REAP funds were leveraged to secure federal money through land and water conservation funds, as well as private funding, to construct the \$500,000 lodge," said Tapken.

"I think REAP has been a very beneficial program for the state of Iowa, simply because it is able to touch every point of Iowa (diversity of REAP funding available). It really hits on every element — in terms of Iowa's resource enhancement and protection — through REAP's eight major programs: Conservation Education, County Conservation, City Parks and Open Space, Public Land Management, Roadside Vegetation, Soil and Water Enhancement, and State Open Space," he said.

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 that 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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YEAR OF FISHING 2015 PLANNING UNDERWAY

The Mississippi River Connections Collaborative's (MRCC) series of events has taken a break for the year of 2014 and will resume in 2015 with the Year of Fishing. Planning is underway for the series of events and the group hopes to kick-off with some January ice fishing on the upper part of the Mississippi River.

As has been a goal for past series of events, like the Summer of Paddling 2012 and Year of Cycling 2013, MRCC strives to connect participants to the river through outdoor recreation and stewardship and encourages participants to continue that year's activity on their own.

For more information about MRCC and the Year of Fishing 2015, visit <http://www.mississippirivertrail.org/trails.html> or contact Cortney Solum at Cortney_solum@fws.gov.

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