

**IOWA
STATE REPORT
January 2019-December 2019**

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Iowa Department of Natural Resources
Conservation and Recreation Division
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Iowa DNR Mission Statement: To conserve and enhance our natural resources in cooperation with individuals and organizations to improve the quality of life in Iowa and ensure a legacy for future generations.

The Department of Natural Resources – Conservation and Recreation Division:

The Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is led by Director Kayla Lyon and Deputy Director Alex Moon. The current Divisions within the DNR are Environmental Services Division (regulatory) and the Conservation and Recreation Division (CRD). CRD is charged with the management of Iowa's fish, wildlife, and natural resource management under the bureaus of Fisheries; Land and Waters; Law Enforcement; State Parks, Forests, and Preserves; and Wildlife. In February 2017, Dr. Dale L. Garner was appointed to serve as Division Administrator.

Natural Resources and Outdoor Recreation Trust Fund (formerly known as Sustainable Natural Resource Funding):

In 2006, the legislatively appointed Sustainable Funding Advisory Committee, chaired by the DNR, began their in-depth four year internal and multi-state research in preparation for their comprehensive reports to the Governor and General Assembly. In 2008 and 2009, proposed legislation was overwhelmingly passed to allow the people of Iowa to vote on a Constitutional amendment that would create a dedicated trust fund. In November 2010, the people of Iowa voted to amend Iowa's Constitution to create the Natural Resources and Outdoor Recreation Trust Fund and authorize a dedicated funding source of 3/8 of 1% of sales tax the next time the tax is legislatively raised. Iowa Code Chapter 461 provides the framework for the distribution, use, and accountability of this Trust Fund. Since the Trust Fund's enactment on January 1, 2011, legislators continue to discuss sales tax options to finance this Trust Fund. To date, the Natural Resources and Outdoor Recreation Trust Fund has not acquired any receipts, although, in 2019, the Governor moved to include in her FY2021 budget the Invest in Iowa Act which supported the funding of the Natural Resources and Outdoor Recreation Trust Fund. The DNR submits mandated reports to the General Assembly annually. These reports and more information can be found at: www.iowadnr.gov/About-DNR/Grants-Other-Funding/Natural-Resources-Rec-Trust.

Support for the DNR's Fish and Wildlife Trust Fund (FWTF): The FWTF is a special account first established in Iowa in 1937 to manage and regulate Iowa's wildlife and fishery resources. In 1996, an amendment to the Iowa Constitution was passed to protect the Trust Fund from being diverted for other purposes during difficult state economic times. This amendment stipulates that fee-generated revenue and associated federal funds can only be used for the

purposes of promoting, managing, researching, and regulating hunting, fishing, and trapping in Iowa. The adjustment to fees was only through legislative action, which reduced flexibility in the DNR's management of funds, and many fees had not been increased since 2003. With the support of many stakeholder groups and license buyers over the years, in 2018, the legislature passed, and Governor signed, a bill that shifted the authority of setting license fees to the DNR (House File 631). New fees were implemented beginning with the 2018-2019 season. Although many fees remained the same, we did decrease a few, as well as increase a few, such as hunting licenses for deer and spring turkey. Staff in our licensing section reported that there were little to no complaints about the increases which indicates to us we are providing a reasonably priced privilege and there is support from our license buyers.

Fisheries Bureau:

Community Fishing Program: The Iowa DNR recently completed a study designed to inform its Community Fishing Program (CFP). The CFP was initiated in 2016 to address the challenges of a continuously urbanizing population, and associated reductions in fishing recruitment, retention, and ultimately participation in angling. To guide the program, DNR's Fisheries Research Section conducted a general population survey to determine constraints and preferences unique to urban and suburban residents, and to identify important factors affecting response.

The survey was sent to 2,500 addresses in the CFP area, which encompassed 18 communities across the state, resulting in 693 valid responses (27.7% response rate). Approximately 29% of Iowans living in the CFP area were not interested in fishing at all. Of the remaining 71% interested in fishing in some way, 8% had never fished before but were interested (i.e., potential anglers), 31% had fished in the past (lapsed anglers), and 33% fished during the last year (active anglers). Interest in fishing was explained by childhood initiation, gender, age, race, and moving frequently during childhood. Notably, those exposed to fishing as children had 4.6 times greater odds of being interested in fishing as adults than those who were not exposed to fishing as children. Although moving frequently was important, the rurality of the respondent's background (city kids versus country kids) was not. In other words, increasingly urban lifestyles are not necessarily the death knell for recreational fishing.

Instead, provision of appropriate fishery resources and associated communications is key. Significant differences in constraints and preferences existed between traditional active anglers and the recruitment pool living in urban and suburban areas. For example, potential anglers associated convenience with an ideal fishing trip, emphasizing the importance of providing fishing opportunities close to home. This may require extensive partnership with municipalities, counties, housing associations, and other private entities to establish greater public access to urban fishing ponds or streams. Fishing locations also require certain amenities to draw underrepresented groups in the CFP area; a pond alone is often not enough for urban users. Potential anglers were also interested in a unique set of educational and outreach programs, and these preferences can be used to better target specific audiences. Preferences also differed consistently by childhood initiation, gender, age, race, and rurality. Targeted efforts by an agency focused on engaging underrepresented demographics groups should be tailored accordingly to maximize effectiveness in recruiting and retaining new anglers in urban and suburban areas.

Forestry Section:

Forest Health: Foresters continued to monitor for serious insect, disease, invasive plant species, and environmental problems in Iowa's woodlands. Aerial surveys of 1,915,426 acres was mapped to determine forest health problems and potential management plans. There were 1,012,598 aerial acres mapped out of dead and dying trees from emerald ash borer alone. Ground confirmations were conducted to resolve any issues identified in the aerial survey. District foresters worked with impacted landowners on appropriate salvage and reforestation efforts in areas with oak wilt, Dutch elm disease, oak tatters, aspen decline, bur oak blight storm, and flood damage.

In cooperation with the IDALS State Entomologist and the USDA, the Forestry Bureau assisted in contracting, placing, and monitoring 4,395 gypsy moth traps that captured 35 male gypsy moths. A total of 604 walnut twig beetle monitoring traps were placed around the state. No walnut twig beetles were captured. However, 2,804 ambrosia beetles, Pityophthorus beetles, and weevils that were collected and submitted as part of the national survey. A total of 36,054 maples in 47 counties were examined for the presence of Asian longhorned beetle. None of the trees were positive for Asian longhorned beetle. Several invasive plant workshops were hosted with the demand being on Oriental bittersweet control. Twenty-one pest workshops were held to cover the pests detailed above.

The **Urban and Community Forestry Program** continues to provide technical, educational and financial assistance to communities, individuals and organizations. Last year the program provided support to 352 communities. One of the main components of assistance continues to be tree inventories, forestry management plans and emerald ash borer (EAB) preparation for communities under 5,000 in population. A recent statewide canopy cover assessment provides data on where and how much tree cover we have in Iowa. Iowa communities have 18.5 percent tree cover, about 253,056 acres of community forest. Urban Forests continue to be threatened by canopy loss. The economic loss caused by the top five key pests (Gypsy moth, bur oak blight, EAB, Asian long-horned beetle and thousand cankers disease) is an estimated \$1.4 billion over 20 years for forest landowners and wood products businesses and over \$20 billion in urban tree removal. Additionally, Forest Service studies show 4.5 million trees were lost due to development in Iowa from 2010 to 2015.

Land and Waters Bureau:

Public Land Acquisition and Management Program: The bureau provides assistance to operating bureaus to acquire lands and to address land management issues, such as unauthorized land-uses and boundary issues. It also assists the program bureaus with agreements such as habitat leases, county or city management agreements, office leases and building disposal agreements. In 2019, public land and conservation easement acquisitions totaling 4,131 acres, protected natural resources and provided Iowans with new and enhanced outdoor recreational opportunities, impacted water quality and watershed improvement efforts and also impacted recovery efforts for federally endangered species.

Rivers Program: This program contains multiple programs over four major areas, which includes: water trail outreach, mapping, planning, designing, constructing and signing; low-head dam mitigation to remove or reduce hazards to public safety and/or fish passage; moving water

education instruction and training; and comprehensive conservation efforts, in partnership with local groups and stakeholders, in identified protected water areas. A total of 970 miles of dedicated water trails have been developed, 66 miles pending designation and 753 additional miles under evaluation.

Environmental Review & Sovereign Lands Program: The Environmental Review and Sovereign Lands Construction Permit staff apply information about endangered species, state preserves, natural communities, and other significant natural resources for the review of potential environmental impact of proposed construction and development projects requiring a permit from the Department. The Threatened & Endangered Species staff coordinates the conservation of 18 federally listed species of plants and animals and over 300 state-listed species. Staff develop and maintain a database of locations of listed species and special natural communities such as prairie and fen wetlands and oversee research activities including federally funded projects. The State Preserves staff work with the State Preserves Advisory Board to develop and maintain a statewide network of 97 preserves on lands with significant biological, geological, archaeological, historical, or scenic value.

Engineering and Construction Services: This program oversees the Department's capital improvement projects. From the smallest outhouse to complete lake and watershed renovation projects, professional staff provide and put into practice the most advanced technology to ensure safe and cost effective solutions to architectural and engineering projects. Services provided include: planning and development, topographic surveys, professional engineering and architectural design services, contract administration, project management and construction inspection, federal emergency management, emergency response projects, consultant selection and contract negotiations, and investigative reporting. In 2019, 44 engineering, construction, and public capital improvement projects totaling \$17,821,238.04 on public lands were contracted; \$11,639,588.36 of these projects were associated with lake restoration, watershed, and water quality improvement projects.

Lake Restoration Program: Many of our Iowa Lakes, similar to our nation's lakes, are impaired and suffer from excessive algae growth and sedimentation due to nutrient loading and soil loss. The Lake Restoration Program's focus is on restoring Iowa's significant publicly owned lakes and publicly-owned shallow lakes/wetlands. The goal is to invest in projects with multiple benefits such as improved water quality, a healthy aquatic community, and increased public use. Iowa has completed restoration work at 25 lakes, with 21 projects underway, and 14 projects in the initial planning stages. Additionally, restoration work has been completed on over 33 shallow lakes/wetlands across the state.

Law Enforcement Bureau: Currently, the Iowa DNR Law Enforcement Bureau employs 83 full-time, sworn peace officers serving as Conservation Officers. The Law Enforcement Chief retired in June of 2019, and a search to fill the position began with the successful hiring of Chief Trace Kendig at the end of 2019.

With vacancies in the field in 2019, Iowa's officers continue to often times serve several counties. They have to prioritize calls and work efficiently to complete their duties. Deer calls

take up the bulk of an officer's time in the fall as many people come to Iowa in search of a trophy buck.

Although many cases being made throughout the state are by the use of social media and online postings, citizen awareness and reporting are still essential to identifying criminal behavior. In November of 2019, a Conservation Officer handled a thrill killing case. Deer hunters called in that they were hearing multiple shots go off in the area where they were hunting. The caller saw the suspect vehicle and gave a description to the Officer. The truck was located and two suspects were located. Through interviews, the suspects admitted to shooting multiple deer, a Canada goose, raccoons, cats, and cattle. In addition, one of the shooters was a convicted felon. The Officer found a total of 11 dead deer and 3 cows scattered across the country side that were left to waste. There was a total of 42 citations issued and a request of \$30,000 in liquidated damages not including the livestock.

The Special Investigative Unit had an important case that culminated in the Fall of 2019. Beginning in 2018, and continuing through 2019, our Law Enforcement Bureau was involved in a cooperative investigation with the Missouri Department of Conservation and the United States Fish and Wildlife Service. The investigation focused on the illegal take of big game in Missouri and Iowa by guides and clients of non-typical outfitters located in south central Iowa and north central Missouri. The investigation is ongoing and DNR Conservation Officers continue to document illegal hunting activities related to this investigation. The Iowa DNR expects prosecution to begin in 2020.

State Parks, Forests, and Preserves Bureau: Iowa's state park system is comprised of 91 parks and recreation areas totaling over 60,000 acres. DNR manages 71 parks and recreation areas and state forest campgrounds with the remaining 20 parks and recreation areas managed by local political subdivisions through management agreements. Iowa's state forest system of over 46,000 acres is comprised of four large state forests.

Recreation: Millions of people continue to enjoy Iowa's natural resources and recreational opportunities in state parks. In 2019, camping guest days totaled 790,078, up 5.5% from the previous year. There were 48,342 camping reservations made through the centralized reservation system, up 6.8% from the previous year. In 2019, the bureau implemented the use of field manager module in the reservation system to collect walk-in camping information. The data provides information on occupancy rates which is one component used in the review for park pricing.

Nonresident Vehicle Entrance Permit Pilot: In 2019, the Iowa legislature passed Senate File 306 which established a nonresident user fee pilot program for Lake Manawa and Waubonsie State Parks. Both parks host many visitors from neighboring states. The legislation requires nonresidents to purchase a daily entrance pass or annual pass to use these two parks. The pilot will give the bureau the opportunity to document and evaluate the successes and challenges of a nonresident permit. The permit system went into effect August 15, 2019. At the end of 2019, 1,086 daily permits were sold and 132 annual permits were sold generating \$9,900 in new revenue. The pilot program ends June 30, 2022.

State Parks 100th Anniversary: Much of 2019 was spent planning and preparing to celebrate the 100th Anniversary of Iowa State Parks in 2020. The Iowa legislature appropriated \$1,000,000 for maintenance and preparation for the anniversary. Facilities received much needed maintenance, picnic tables were replaced or fixed, and new rock was placed on campsite pads. As part of the planning effort, the bureau recognized the need to take a comprehensive look at signage in the park system. A consultant was hired to evaluate the current signage system and create a new signage master plan for the next 100 years. The new signs will be unveiled in 2020. Iowans can look forward to a wide variety of events and activities in 2020 that will: *celebrate* the importance of state parks to Iowa's history, culture and quality of life, *connect* Iowans to natural resources in a personal and passionate way; and *inspire* a high level of appreciation of stewardship of the Iowa state park system for the future.

State Forests: State Forests provide some of the largest contiguous tracts of public forest land in Iowa. They are sustainably managed to yield forest products; provide wildlife habitat; aid in soil, and water protection; offer protection of unique plant and animal communities; and provide outdoor recreational opportunities. They are the backbone of several of Iowa's Bird Conservation Areas. State Forest staff completed 834 acres of forest stand improvement, 63 acres of reforestation, 737 miles of trail maintenance, 3,758 acres of prescribed fire, 57 acres of prairie and savanna management, collected 1108 bushels of seed, and conducted 19 educational programs in 2019. They also sold 682,041 board feet of timber valued at \$274,796.

Wildlife Bureau: The Wildlife Bureau operates and maintains 492 public fish and wildlife areas spanning 403,572 acres. About one-third of these acres are federal lands managed by the wildlife bureau under agreements with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Federal lands include more than 22,560 acres of Waterfowl Production Areas in the Prairie Pothole Region of Iowa. All of these public lands are managed to provide quality wildlife habitats and hunting, fishing, and other consumptive and non-consumptive fish and wildlife related recreational opportunities. Managed wildlife habitats include nearly 100,000 acres of wetlands, 140,000 acres of grasslands, and 115,000 acres of forest/woodland. Annual management activities include burning 35,089 acres of prairie, and managing wetland habitats through water level manipulation utilizing 881 water control structures, 246 miles of dams, dikes, and levees and 33 pumping stations.

The **private lands access program, also known as IHAP** (Iowa Habitat Access Program) started in 2011 under a Voluntary Public Access grant from U.S. Dept. of Agriculture. For the 2019/2020 hunting season there were 161 sites and 22,403 acres of managed wildlife habitats on private lands open to public hunting. The majority of IHAP acres include wildlife habitats that are fully established. Hunting use and satisfaction continues to trend upward as these new habitats become better established. 99% of hunters indicate they would hunt an IHAP site again with upland birds being the most pursued game.

The **Private Lands Program** assists landowners in implementing forestry and wildlife habitat on their properties. In 2019, efforts to promote conservation on private land were expanded by adding 1 additional Forestry Specialist and 3 Wildlife Specialists. These positions were made possible by partnering with the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, Natural Resource Conservation Service, Conservation Districts of Iowa and Wildlife Management Institute.

Professionally developed forest and wildlife management plans are developed benefiting a combination of public and private lands through forest stand improvement, prescribed fire, prairie seedings, wetland development and, other habitat management activities.

Since 2002, Iowa has tested 83,139 wild white-tailed deer and 4,779 captive deer and elk for **Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD)**. In 2019-2020, IA DNR staff collected medial retropharyngeal lymph nodes from 7,362 wild white-tailed deer, as well as lymph nodes and obex from 182 captive cervids for CWD testing. Of the wild white-tailed deer tested, 294 were harvested by sharpshooters in an Iowa City cull effort. All of the culled deer tested negative for CWD. We entered the 2019-2020 sampling season with 45 known CWD-positive white-tailed deer from the endemic zones (Allamakee, Clayton, and Wayne Counties) plus a single roadkill detection in Dubuque County dating to 2018. We detected an additional 22 positives in Allamakee, 9 in Clayton, and 5 in Wayne. We detected new positives in Fayette (2) and Winneshiek (3) Counties to the northeast, Decatur County (1) to the south, and Woodbury County (1) to the west. The IDNR will be transitioning to a weighted surveillance approach for the 2020-2021 sampling season. We will increase sampling in new Disease Management Zones (DMZs) and continue monitoring prevalence in established DMZs, in conjunction with baseline surveillance objectives statewide.

The **Wildlife Research Section** is actively engaged in several wildlife research projects aimed at improving our ability to manage Iowa's wildlife resources. Projects of note include studies looking at Canada geese, sandhill cranes, trumpeter swans, wild turkeys, and forest wildlife. Specifically, we are looking at the survival rates and movements of urban Canada geese in an attempt to inform management practices that will minimize social issues. We are investigating the viability of marking and tracking sandhill cranes as their population expands into Iowa. We are working jointly with Minnesota biologists to track trumpeter swan nest success and survival. Reports indicate that wild turkey populations are declining across the Midwest. The Wildlife Research Section is investigating disease prevalence and poulting production to gain an increased understanding of potential drivers for the decline. Lastly, the Wildlife Bureau is monitoring the response of forest wildlife species to the removal of invasive species such as bush honeysuckle from Iowa woodlands.