

Frequently Asked Questions

How messy is it?

Project AWARE isn't for the person who's afraid to get a little dirt under his or her fingernails. While most of your time is spent in a canoe or kayak, you are still fully immersed in the wilderness and eventually you're bound to get dirty. Prepare to find mud in awkward places and potentially stinky things in your canoe. Most people find this aspect appealing; remembering the days when they were just kids playing in the mud.



What do I need to bring?

A desire to help cleanup Iowa's rivers, a positive attitude, and the ability to have fun! You will also need some camping gear and other related equipment since your sleeping quarters will be the great outdoors. There are no real requirements for things to bring on AWARE, but a checklist of suggested items to pack can be downloaded from the Project AWARE website at: www.iowadnr.gov/aware. A general rule of thumb when packing for AWARE is – pack everything you need for all types of weather, but pack as efficiently as possible. When in doubt, volunteers are encouraged to err on the side of preparedness and simplicity. With experience comes knowledge. Project AWARE is a great way to learn camping, paddling, and other outdoor skills from a variety of people. If you're not sure about what to bring on Project AWARE, you are encouraged to contact the AWARE support staff with any questions you might have about packing for the cleanup.

A few crucial items that you may want to make sure are packed...

- Reusable dinnerware
- Extra sets of dry clothes packed in plastic bags
- The creams/sprays: Bug spray, sun screen, hand sanitizer
- A pair of shoes just for wearing when on the river, another, more comfortable pair of shoes to wear at camp, and flip flops to wear when showers are available.
- An up-to-date tetanus shot

What happens to my camping stuff every day?

Every morning before the volunteers shove off for the day, all camping gear and other items are loaded into a trailer and transported to the next camping location. No need to worry about lugging the weight of your tent in that canoe! The less you have in your canoe to start the day, the more trash you can put in it. Essentially, the only thing volunteers need to have in their canoes to start the day is a PFD (Personal Floatation Device), paddle, day pack (water, first-aid, rain/cold gear, etc.), cooler with lunch and snacks, and plenty of water.



How is my overall safety accounted for?

Rest assured that when you participate in Project AWARE, you aren't just turned loose on the river to fend for yourself. All volunteers are required to wear PFDs at all times, and most staff are certified in first aid and CPR. Support staff also carry an AED (Automated External Defibrillator) during the event and have been trained in its use. DNR Staff accompany volunteers in motorized boats where possible, and for each day a lead and sweeper canoe are assigned to ensure no one gets too far ahead of the group and no one is left behind. Volunteers are required to check-in before going out on the water and check-out when coming off.

Experienced paddlers are also encouraged to partner up with those less-experienced.

As for bad weather...

We have a host of DNR and Project AWARE officials monitoring the weather conditions at all times. In the event of severe weather, participants are transported to a predetermined shelter for the duration of the weather event, unless of course, the severe weather occurs when volunteers are out on the water. During a severe weather event on the water, volunteers are instructed to seek shelter on the riverbank and never paddle in a lightning storm.



How will I know what to do?

Those new to AWARE will not be left up river without a paddle. We try to pair individuals based on their relative level of experience. That way, those with more experience can help out those who might be new. Also, an organized paddling clinic is made available on the first day and can be attended at the volunteer's discretion.

How long do I have to stay?

There is no minimum time commitment to helping out with AWARE. Come for the entire event or come for the day – you're always welcome on AWARE!

Do I need to bring my own food?

No. AWARE registration fees are based on the food you eat and the catering services that provide it. While you don't need to bring your own food, you do need to bring your own dinnerware. Since we want to do what we can to 'walk the waste reduction talk,' no disposable dinnerware is provided.

What if I have a special diet?

Vegetarian, vegan, and other special diet options may be available, but you have to contact AWARE staff when you register so they can do the best they can to address your dietary needs and make arrangements with the caterers.



So...I really smell - Am I supposed to just jump in the river to bathe now?

Not exactly. The majority of the volunteers do their showering via shower houses (when available) or by personal, portable shower water bags. Honestly, many participants can tell you that since the majority of the day is spent around trash, the smell of your fellow volunteers often pales in comparison. You'll also find that a dip in the river isn't so bad when shower houses aren't available and your stench has reached its maximum. Hey, didn't we say this was going to be like a trip back in time to the days of your childhood?



OK, so after being out on the river all day and now it is time to wind down...now what?

There are a number of things volunteers do to keep the experience fun when they're off the river. Every night, presentations are given by local and statewide experts that pertain to water quality and other environmental topics. Participants also keep entertained in a number of other ways - some people bring guitars to play or often just sit around a fire and chat. For many, Project AWARE has been likened to a reunion in the way that everyone is so open and kind, it's hard not to become attached to those around you.



Who does Project AWARE anyway?

One of the nice aspects of Project AWARE is the wide range of individuals who participate year after year. From young scouts to middle school teachers, to grandparents – Project AWARE truly is for anyone and everyone. So the only question that remains is...



www.iowadnr.gov/aware

See ya' on the river!

