

IOWATER

Volunteer Water Quality Monitoring

Project AWARE 2004

The new guy gets his hands dirty.

by Michael Dhar

After four days worth of Project AWARE brush cleaning, canoe paddling, and mud-buried trash digging, I can now wave a pair of dirt-encrusted, formerly white work gloves like a victory banner. In an ideal world, I would do so astride my canoe, with a heap of vanquished trash beneath me, and the wild waters of Lizard Creek surging around me.

The DNR's second-annual watershed appreciation and protection event, Project AWARE, took place during the third week of June this year. As the newly appointed communications point man for the Keepers of the Land Americorps program, I joined the weeklong AWARE program for its first four days. Of course, you can only observe and take notes for so long before you succumb to the temptation to pick up a handsaw and start hacking at invasive species, or plunge your hands into riverbank mud to dig out an old oil drum.

With an equal mixture of prairie rescues, canoe cleanups, and educational adventures, Project AWARE attracted more than 100 people. Heavy rains and high waters forced event organizers to alter the original plan – a 107 mile trek down the Des Moines River – and opt for a "Plan B" that included prairie rescue, lake cleanups, and day trips to tributaries like Soldier and Lizard creeks.

"The fact that we can't paddle the river highlights how serious the issue is," said AWARE participant and Iowa State University biology professor, Jim Colbert. "If this watershed were healthy, we could paddle." Watershed management efforts that address rapid runoff sources like stormwater sewers, paved surfaces and tile lines would help reduce the sudden flow to the rivers, thus minimizing the frequency and extent of floods.

For many participants, this trip was their vacation – they traded in relaxing, all-inclusive getaways for spotting Styrofoam shards along shorelines, plucking tires from streambanks, and removing invasive trees from Iowa's diminishing prairies. "I wanted an active vacation, wanted to get some sun, and I wanted to give something back to the community," said Phyllis Jessen of Des Moines. "This fit the bill."



Project AWARE participants paddle Brushy Creek Lake in search of trash.

Together we can accomplish so much...

This past June, during a formal ceremony at the State Capitol, Governor Thomas Vilsack and Lt. Governor Sally Pederson presented a **2004 Governor's Golden Dome Award** to the IOWATER team. To be considered for this award, an individual or team must first be recognized and nominated by colleagues within state government – an honor all its own, and something that speaks highly for the IOWATER program.

Although the award was officially presented to staff and other state employees who contribute to the program, I truly believe it also belongs to the 2,000 volunteers who support the mission of the IOWATER program by monitoring more than 1,600 sites across the state. Without you as an integral component of the team, IOWATER would cease to exist and the fate of our state's water quality could be jeopardized – thanks for your commitment and dedication to your environment. It's an absolute honor to work not only *with* you, but also *for* you.

Brian Soenen



Pictured left to right: Lt. Governor Sally Pederson, Jacklyn Neely, Lynette Seigley, Brian Soenen, and Governor Thomas Vilsack

Brian, Lynette, and Jackie gratefully accept the Governor's Golden Dome award on behalf of the IOWATER team and all volunteers.

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Above the Call of Duty

Kudos to Brian Soenen for his exceptional planning for Project AWARE 2004. After spending 8 months developing Plan A for the Des Moines River, high waters forced Brian to work nonstop at the last minute to devise Plan B. From the crew and participants of Project AWARE 2004 – *Thanks Brian for keeping the trip afloat!*

Farewell, Kristie

Kristie Raymond has resigned as IOWATER's Program Assistant. She and her husband, Jeff, have moved to Kansas City where Jeff is finishing his medical school residency program. Kristie plans to continue to work on environmental issues and water quality concerns, and we have no doubt that she will make a difference wherever she goes. It has been a wonderful experience working with her, and she will be greatly missed. *Thanks and good luck, Kristie!*

River of words flows through Iowa

On Saturday, June 26th, as 50 weary Project AWARE volunteers invaded Prospect Park after a week of brush removal, trash cleanup, and canoeing—six young, well-dressed students and their families could be found among them. These creative students were chosen as winners for IOWATER's first annual *River of Words* contest and were invited to the closing Project AWARE ceremonies to be publicly recognized by Iowa's Governor Tom Vilsack and First Lady Christie Vilsack.

River of Words® (ROW) is an international organization designed to help youth explore the natural and cultural history of the place they live, and to express, through poetry and art, what they discover. Each year, in affiliation with The Library of Congress Center for the Book, ROW conducts a free poetry and art contest for youth on the theme of watersheds. This past year, entries from across Iowa flooded into Berkeley, California, where two Iowa poems were selected as finalists in the international competition. The remaining entries were returned and judged in our own statewide contest. *Congratulations to IOWATER's 2004 ROW winners, and thanks to all who participated!*

NATIONAL FINALISTS

Poetry

Felon Summers, 17, *Dubuque*
Nicole Higginbotham, 17, *Malvern*

IOWA WINNERS

Poetry

Michelle Grauberger, 7, *Marion*
Olivia Queathem, 9, *Grinnell*
Nick Synan, 13, *Iowa City*
Felon Summers, 17, *Dubuque*

Art

Meg Harper, 7, *Independence*
Meghin Arnold, 12, *Osceola*
Maria Ontiveros, 14, *Bettendorf*

For more information about *River of Words*, visit their website at www.riverofwords.org.
To view the Iowa state winners, visit www.iowater.net, and look for *River of Words* under the Activities menu.

H₂O

Water will trickle,
And water will leak.
Water will ponder,
And water will seek.
Water will freeze,
And water will boil.
Water will rain
And nourish the soil.
Water will rush
And create a wave.
During a storm,
Water will rave.
Water will shape,
And water will shift.
Water will topple,
And water will drift.
In the summer,
Water provides fun
For kids of all ages
Who bask in the sun.

Nicole Higginbotham
age 17
Malvern, IA
NATIONAL FINALIST



AWARE (cont)

Project AWARE inspired passion in all, and even lunacy in some. Get approximately 60 people together at one time, all of whom share a love for the outdoors and a willingness to protect and preserve it, arm them with gloves, trash bags, canoes, and paddles, and strange things can happen. An exceptionally motivated crew pulled their canoes to the shore of Lizard Creek with the goal



Carl Schumann
(above) and author
Michael Dhar (right)
clear brush at Brushy
Creek and Badger
Lake in Webster Co.

of removing several hundred pounds of wire fencing from the streambed. They accomplished this mission by rigging a block and tackle system to a nearby tree, hoisting the monstrosity up a seven-foot bank, all while splashing around in hip-deep water. Another participant found a child's doll in the muck, and affixed it to a stake outside his tent – a warning, I presume, to any other trash that dared enter the river. Of course, a number of bed frames, beer signs, motorcycles, dirty underwear, cars, refrigerators, sunken boats, and teddy bears had already found their way there. With the help of 27 sponsors and the determination of 109 volunteers, these items completed the cycle – over 90% of the trash removed on AWARE was recycled.

"These people are motivated," said retired Ankeny native Carl Schumann (photo, above left), a newcomer to paddling who took canoeing and kayaking classes with the sole purpose of participating in Project AWARE. "All the people – they see a piece of trash, they pick it up. They have the attitude they're going to leave the place better than they found it." . . . Even if it means getting a little dirty.

Volunteer viewpoints

... in their own words.



Clay Smith

The Legendary Lizard by Mark Mason

During the first few weeks of June, some people in Traer may have seen me walking up and down Main Street with a canoe paddle. My objective was twofold. First and foremost, I was engaging people in conversation about my mission, and secondly, I was in search of modest contributions to offset the cost of my trip – sponsors of my own, if you will. My mission, or “vacation,” was to canoe the Des Moines River from Gotch State Park near Humboldt to Prospect Park in Des Moines – 107 miles in all.

Lizard Creek – the name itself didn’t sound very threatening at all, and the advance scouts said it would be an “easy” four hour float. Since heavy rains in the area caused the Des Moines River to rise to unsafe levels, plans had to be made to put the project on Terra Firma, and the prospect of getting on the water caused excitement to well up amongst the group.

As my new partner and I made our way to the banks of the Lizard, I noted a few things – she carried the canoe and gear with ease, and boarded the vessel without hesitation and no unusual wobbling – good indicators of an experienced paddler. I am certainly not what you would call an expert paddler, although I have floated many rivers and lakes in Iowa.

Upon our departure, the advice from the advance scouts tumbled through my head – make friends with “Friendly V’s” and avoid “Evil V’s” – friendly V’s point away from you (downstream), and evil V’s point at you, indicators of submerged hazards. In our case, it was a particularly nasty looking evil V that we made friends with first. After a bit of tugging at the bottom we were free – safe at last – but not for long...we soon drifted a bit too close to the bank and into a snag (paddler talk for overhanging branches).

Anyone who has ever tipped a canoe will tell you few things – you go over fast, you go over deep, and you loose everything that isn’t tied in. After we floated, walked, and swam to retrieve our canoe, we dumped the water, assessed losses, and finished our journey. We were wet, but our pride was not – on the river you rely on experience – pride doesn’t have room in the canoe.

This was my second year with Project AWARE, and I plan to return in '05. Applications for an experienced canoe partner are now being accepted.

Correction

In our last newsletter, the photo that accompanied Ben Petty’s Volunteer Viewpoints article, *Preserving the Lizard*, was incorrectly credited to Ben. This photo, along with the data the article refers to, were submitted to the IOWATER database by Terry Moran for his monitoring site on the South Branch of Lizard Creek. Special thanks go to Terry and to all volunteers who regularly submit such valuable data to the IOWATER database – you are certainly protecting and improving Iowa’s water quality!

A Snapshot of Water Quality in Polk County

by Susan Heathcote, Iowa Environmental Council
and Linda Kinman, Des Moines Water Works

The Iowa Environmental Council and Des Moines Water Works, along with IOWATER, and many other partners helped organize the first Polk County Urban Water Quality Snapshot this spring. Despite having to be delayed a week because of flood conditions in Polk County in late May, the event was a great success. On June 2nd, 36 volunteers helped collect water quality information at 62 locations on the streams and rivers of Polk County. Volunteers used IOWATER field sampling techniques to test water at each site and also collected samples for lab analyses.

Volunteers met in the morning at the Izaak Walton League Clubhouse to form sampling teams and receive sampling instructions and equipment. Volunteers then spread out across the county on a mission to check the water quality of Polk County rivers and streams. By 2:00 pm, teams had returned with their field data sheets and coolers filled with water samples to be delivered to the lab for analysis.

What did we find? The spring snapshot collected water quality information under high water conditions, where impacts of nonpoint source pollution from storm water runoff are greatest. Because of the very high water conditions throughout the county at the time of the snapshot, elevated nitrate and bacteria levels were seen on many streams. The highest nitrate levels were found in four streams; Beaver Creek, Walnut Creek, Fourmile Creek, and Mud Creek. The highest *E. coli* bacteria counts were found on the Raccoon River upstream of Des Moines and on the Des Moines River downstream from Des Moines. Several small streams, including Firestone Creek, Laurel Hill Cemetery Stream, and Leetown Creekway, had high chloride levels which may be an indication of point source pollution such as sewage.

A public meeting is planned for September 8, 2004, Wallace Building Conference Rooms 4E and 4W, in Des Moines at noon to discuss the monitoring results. A repeat of the Polk County Snapshot will be conducted October 13, 2004, under low flow conditions, where impacts from point sources such as wastewater treatment plants will likely be more evident. If you are interested in attending the public meeting or helping with the fall snapshot, contact Susan Heathcote at 515-244-1194 or Linda Kinman at 515-283-8706.



Ben Friedman

Geri Crawford and Mary Gillaspey of Metro Waste Authority monitor Firestone Creek in Des Moines.

We'd like to hear
from you, so
send us a note...
about your
IOWATER activities,
thoughts, and
ideas **...in your
own words.**

Upcoming events

... snapshot sampling & more.



Sept. 18 (Sat); Old Mans Creek/Clear Creek Snapshot
Contact: Dave Ratliff (319) 354-1397 day;
(319) 337-4445 evening or oldmanscreek@qwest.net

Sept. 25 (Sat); Beaver Creek Snapshot
(Boone and Polk Counties)
Contact: Steve Witmer (515) 727-7765
switmer@ci.johnson.ia.us

Oct. 2 (Sat); Whitebreast Creek Watershed
Contact: Anne Hildebrand (515) 961-5264
Anne.Hildebrand@ia.nacdnet.net

Oct. 12 (Tue); Scott County Snapshot
Contact: Sara Kosieracki (563) 326-6150
sara.kosieracki@ia.usda.gov

Oct. 13 (Wed); Polk County Snapshot
Contacts: Susan Heathcote (515) 244-1194
Heathcote@earthweshare.org or Linda Kinman
(515) 283-8706 kinman@dmww.com

Oct. 16 (Sat); IOWATER Fall Statewide Snapshot
Contact: Lynette Seigley (319) 335-1598
lseigley@igsb.uiowa.edu

Oct. 19 (Tue); Muscatine County Snapshot
Contact: Matt McAndrew (563) 263-7944
Matt.McAndrew@ia.nacdnet.net

Oct. 23 (Sat); Wapsi River Watershed
Contact: Vicki Wilson (319) 827-1690
mvw@jtt.net

IOWATER action!

Press releases, events, & news articles involving IOWATER monitors – Many thanks to all of you for your continued efforts.



- **Bremer County** – Tammy Turner and Matt Manson of the Bremer County Conservation Board initiated the Bremer County Non-Point Source Pollution Education Initiative for Crane Creek.
- **Clayton County** – Elkader High School Freshman sampled the Turkey River. Thanks to Tri-Star FFA for loaning waders and equipment for the event.
- **Des Moines River Watershed** – Thanks to all Project AWARE volunteers who spent a week "Making a Difference."
- **Howard County** – Riceville FFA received a \$1,300 Environment First Grant from the Iowa Farm Bureau.
- **Iowa County** – Ellen Hartz and her ECHO Alternative High School classes received an \$8,900 grant from Toyota and the National Science Teachers Association.
- **Jackson County** – The Jackson County Conservation Board held a Stream Check Up on Prairie Creek.
- **Linn County** – Congratulations to Sharon Bender on receiving the "Above and Beyond" award from Governor Vilsack.
- **Mahaska County** – The Mahaska Izaak Walton League sponsored a South Skunk River Sampling event.
- **Minnesota** – The Greater Blue Earth River Watershed Initiative monitored Minnesota streams that enter Iowa.
- **Mitchell County** – St. Ansgar FFA received a \$1,500 Environment First Grant from the Iowa Farm Bureau to sample Turtle Creek and the Cedar River.
- **O'Brien County** – The Hartley-Melvin-Sanborn 8th grade Earth Science class participated in O'Brien County's Snapshot.
- **Plymouth County** – IOWATER wishes Ron Wilmot a happy retirement from teaching at Akron-Westfield Community Schools. Ron received the IOWATER Educator of the Year Award in 2002.
- **Poweshiek County** – Poweshiek County Farm Bureau publicly recognized all volunteers in Poweshiek County.
- **Polk County** – Yeader Creek Project worked with the IOWATER program to improve water quality in Yeader Creek.
- **Polk County** – The City of Johnston and Mayor Brian J. Lorenzo recognized Project AWARE volunteers and IOWATER volunteers for participating in the Great North American Secchi Dip-In.
- **Statewide** – Thanks to organizers and participants in the spring/summer snapshots, including O'Brien, Muscatine, Cedar, Scott, Polk, and Jefferson counties; Cedar Lake, Whitebreast, Wapsipinicon, Old Mans/Clear Creek, and Cedar River watersheds; and the IOWATER Spring and Summer snapshots.
- **Warren County** – Annette Purdy and her Winterset High School classes received a \$2,500 grant from Toyota Tapestry.

If we missed your happenings, please call or email Jackie Neely with an update.

IOWATER 2004 Level I Workshop Schedule

Date	Location	Contact	Phone	E-mail
August 12-13	Ida County	Steve Hummel	(712)364-3300	mshummel@netins.net or idaccb@pionet.net
September 10-11	Clayton County	Eric Palas	(563)245-1713	eric.palas@ia.usda.gov

IOWATER 2004 Advanced Workshops

You must have attended a Level 1 workshop to participate in an advanced workshop.

The advanced workshop remaining in 2004 is: ● **Benthic Macroinvertebrate Indexing**

The registration fee is \$10 for the advanced workshop. To register for this IOWATER workshop, please fill out and send in the registration form below. You will be sent confirmation, maps, and more information when paid registration is received. Checks should be made payable to the Iowa DNR.



IOWATER Advanced Workshop Registration Form

● **Benthic Macroinvertebrate Indexing**

Date	Time	Location
August 21	8 AM -12 PM	Jones County (Central Park Nature Center)

Name _____ Organization _____

Address _____
Street or PO Box _____ City State _____ Zip Code _____

Phone: (day) _____ (evening) _____

E-Mail _____

Make check out to Iowa DNR (\$10 for each advanced workshop).

Questions: contact Jackie at (515) 281-4476 or Jacklyn.neely@dnr.state.ia.us

Send To: **Jackie Neely, Iowa DNR – Wallace Office Bldg., 502 East 9th Street, Des Moines, IA 50319**

IOWATER

Wallace State Office Building
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Des Moines, IA 50319

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Shaded Vision

Maria Ontiveros
age 14
Bettendorf, IA

Award Winners for

IOWATER'S

1st Annual

RIVER of WORDS

Environmental

Poetry & Art

IOWA

Competition 2004