

**To:** Honorable Governor Terry E. Branstad  
Members of the Iowa General Assembly

**From:** The Iowa Natural Resource Commission

**Date:** January 8, 2014

### **2013 NRC Annual Report and Recommendations**

The Natural Resource Commission (NRC) respectfully submits its Annual Report to the Governor and General Assembly of Iowa. The report represents the major activities and accomplishments of the NRC for 2013 and includes the Commission's legislative recommendations for 2014.

The NRC extends its thanks for your review and consideration of the report and recommendations, and stands willing to answer any questions or receive comments.

Sincerely,



Margo Underwood, Chair, Clear Lake, IA  
Natural Resource Commission

Dr. Sally Prickett, Vice-Chair, Glenwood, IA  
Kim Francisco, Secretary, Lucas, IA  
Marcus Branstad, West Des Moines, IA  
Conrad Clement, Cresco, IA  
Phyllis Reimer, Crescent, IA  
Dennis Schemmel, Grimes, IA

## **Iowa Natural Resource Commission 2013 Annual Report and Recommendations**

The Iowa Natural Resource Commission (NRC) submits the following report to Governor Branstad and the Iowa General Assembly. The report discusses the accomplishments and status of the programs administered by the Conservation and Recreation Division of the Department of Natural Resources (DNR). Based on issues regarding the state of natural resources in Iowa over the last year, the report also makes legislative recommendations for consideration by the Governor and General Assembly.

The NRC implores the Governor and General Assembly to hold the protection and enhancement of Iowa's natural resources in the highest regard during the legislative process. The NRC regards natural resources management to be an inherent duty of decision-making legislators, and the preservation and enhancement of the state's natural wonders should also be viewed as economic development tools.

Studies over the last seven years dramatically illustrate how Iowa's natural resources are vital to the state's economy. For instance hunters, anglers and wildlife enthusiasts represent a total economic benefit to the State of Iowa of \$1.61 billion per year, including \$778,924,727 in local retail sales that creates and supports more than 11,369 jobs! Visitors and users of Iowa's state parks, rivers, lakes, forests and trails account for \$3 billion in spending revenues annually.

Public polling continues to illustrate that the majority of Iowa's citizens want broader recreational opportunities and restored natural resources. The electorate overwhelmingly approved the Iowa Land & Water initiative in 2010, sending the message that they are willing to pay the price for cleaner air, soil and water. Similarly, Polk County voters recently authorized its Conservation Board to borrow \$50 million to be spent over the next 20 years on natural resource enhancements and outdoor recreational opportunities.

Yet, while the DNR continues to face stiff challenges in its charge to protect and enrich Iowa's inherent resources, Department under-funding remains the most daunting obstacle. The NRC urges the Governor and General Assembly, during its appropriations process, to rethink the fiscal obligations necessary for the DNR to execute its vital and essential work.

## **Iowa Natural Resource Commission 2013 Major Accomplishments**

- Twenty-six Resource Enhancement and Protection (REAP) city and county projects were approved in the amount of \$3,144,980. If REAP had been fully funded at \$20 million, which was the original legislative intent upon passage, another 10 projects worth \$1,988,136 could have been approved in FY13.
- Twenty-one state park improvement projects were approved in the amount of \$8,846,336. The NRC participated on the Governor's Green Ribbon Commission to develop a Parks Strategic Plan for 2020.
- The NRC approved five contracts and six engineering projects related to lake restoration, watershed and water quality improvements. The Lake Restoration Program has 25 lake restoration projects in progress and 14 projects in initial evaluation or planning stages throughout the state.
- Under the Iowa Habitat and Access Program (IHAP), the NRC approved voluntary habitat restorations on 49 sites totaling 7,511 acres. Hunter satisfaction surveys showed overwhelming satisfaction by hunters. Landowner surveys showed 100% were satisfied with the program.
- The electronic fish barrier project was completed in the Iowa Great Lakes System. Education completed by the Department on Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) this year included billboards, signs, news releases, brochures, and a State Fair Exhibit. Television advertisements were aired on the new requirements that became law after July 2013.
- The NRC approved public land and conservation easement acquisitions totaling 3,440 acres, protecting the natural resources and providing Iowans with more outdoor recreational opportunities. The DNR paid \$869,118 in property taxes on publicly held land.
- The Forestry Bureau's Woodland Health Initiative continues to provide technical assistance to communities and rural landowners. Assistance was provided to 104 communities and 41 community tree inventories were completed. Sixteen Emerald Ash Borer Workshops were held with 584 attendees.
- The NRC continued its vigilance in authorizing many construction projects on DNR public lands and Wildlife Management Areas (and insisting upon green construction practices and the implementation of Low Impact Development (LID) techniques), hearing contested court cases involving conservation law enforcement issues, establishing hunting and fishing seasons and regulations and securing land management issues including leases and conservation easements.

## **Iowa Natural Resource Commission 2014 Legislative Recommendations**

As the General Assembly convenes, the NRC urges the Iowa Legislature to lend due recognition in its decision-making process to the DNR. Among the recommendations of the NRC are:

- Fund the Resource Enhancement and Protection Program (REAP) at \$25 million in honor of the program's 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. REAP grants are time-tested to be highly successful avenues for the state, counties and cities to fund conservation, recreation and infrastructure projects.
- Fund the DNR's Lake Restoration and Water Quality Improvement Programs at \$8.6 million annually. Iowans value healthy lakes and respond to restoration projects by significantly increasing recreational usage. The highly successful lake restoration projects add to the state's overall water quality, currently an important topic with the Environmental Protection Agency.
- Continue the multi-year funding for state park infrastructure improvements. The Legislature's \$5 million appropriation in 2012 to upgrade aging and flood-ravaged infrastructure in the state parks system should be renewed annually, leveraging resources by partnering with the Iowa Parks Foundation.
- Educate the appropriate resource user groups and decision makers of the impacts of Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) and the importance of preventing introduction and spread.
- Support the DNR's Woodland Health Initiative and appropriate \$1,900,000 for Community Woodland Health grants, technical assistance and education to 75-100 Iowa communities.
- Recognize and support the DNR's communication and outreach programs designed to increase younger Iowans' connections with the state's natural resources. Youth participation in mentored hunting and fishing programs and hunter education and shooting sports in school programs are vital in keeping future generations interested in, and working for, outdoor recreational opportunities.
- Support sustainable funding to expand the voluntary Iowa Habitat and Access Program (IHAP).
- Raise the state sales tax by one percent, automatically devoting 3/8 of each penny to the betterment of Iowa's natural resources as prescribed by the passage of the Iowa Land & Water Legacy campaign in 2010. The act would dedicate an estimated \$150 million annually to the state's woefully under-funded conservation, habitat and recreational initiatives. In lieu of a dedicated funding stream, please consider transferring a portion of the ending balance not captured in the Rainy Day fund into the Conservation Trust Fund to help address natural resource management.

## Iowa Natural Resource Commission Conclusion

The NRC is a group of Governor-appointed citizen volunteers with diverse backgrounds, interests and personalities. Commissioners share a love of the outdoors and a strong sense of responsibility to protect and enhance the natural resources of Iowa.

Polling and other survey tools illustrate that Iowa citizens care deeply about natural resources and the recreational opportunities they provide. Added benefits include improved health and quality of life and continued strengthening of our state's economic development. The NRC – in partnership with the DNR and other local, state and federal organizations and agencies – works steadfastly to that end.

A passionate and professional DNR family and its NRC support group will continue to tirelessly place Iowa's natural resources on a lofty level of priority and favor.

The NRC thanks the Governor and General Assembly for the opportunity to submit this report and invites further inquiry and conversation about these issues.

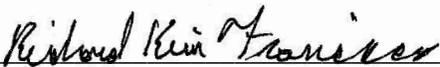
Respectfully Submitted,  
The Iowa Natural Resource Commission



Margo Underwood, Chair – Clear Lake, IA  
Commissioner, Iowa Natural Resource Commission



Dr. Sally Prickett, Vice Chair – Glenwood, IA  
Commissioner, Iowa Natural Resource Commission



Richard (Kim) Francisco, Secretary – Lucas, IA  
Commissioner, Iowa Natural Resource Commission



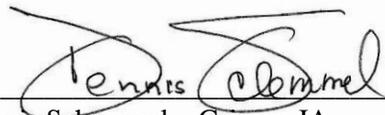
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