

**To: Honorable Governor Kim Reynolds
Members of the Iowa General Assembly**

From: The Iowa Natural Resource Commission

Date: February 8, 2019

2018 Annual Report and Recommendations

The Iowa 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 under the purview of the NRC for 2018 and includes the commission's recommendations for policy and legislative changes for 2019.

In preface to this annual report, the Commission would like to thank you for the bi-partisan support and signing into law the bills allowing dynamic pricing for State Parks (SF2389) and enabling the Hunting Fishing and Trapping fees to be set by administrative rule (HF631). These actions will allow the Department to manage our resources more effectively for Iowa's citizens and visitors.

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

Phyllis Reimer, Vice-Chair, Crescent, IA
Kim Francisco, Secretary, Lucas, IA
Marcus Branstad, Adel, IA
Tom Prickett, Glenwood, IA
Dennis Schemmel, Grimes, IA

Iowa Natural Resource Commission 2018 Major Accomplishments

- The Fish and Wildlife Trust Fund was signed into law allowing hunting, fishing and trapping fees to be set by administrative rule. The new law had bi-partisan support and was promoted by license buyers and stakeholder groups.
- Dynamic Pricing for State Parks was signed into law allowing fees for camping and rental facilities to be established by the IDNR. A flexible pricing structure will help the IDNR maximize facility use during off-peak seasons and at under-used parks, market and promote state park opportunities and manage state park infrastructure.
- Twenty-two Resource Enhancement and Protection (REAP) city and county grant projects were approved in the amount of \$2,541,940. If REAP had been fully funded at \$20 million, which was the original legislative intent upon its passage, another 10 projects worth \$1,379,697 could have been approved in FY19.
- Thirty state park improvement projects in 23 different state parks were approved in the amount of \$8,623,927. These projects included upgrading aging and storm damaged infrastructure, repairing roads, renovating existing park facilities, campground upgrades and adding new facilities such as ADA compliant restrooms and showers.
- The NRC approved 16 Lake Restoration Program contracts and 14 engineering projects. The Lake Restoration Program has 19 lake improvement projects in progress and 16 additional projects in initial evaluation and planning stages throughout the state.
- The Iowa Habitat and Access Program (IHAP) received strong support from landowners and hunters to continue the program in FY19. Currently there are 161 sites totaling 22,547 acres that are open for public hunting during the 2018-19 hunting season.
- Educational programs to prevent the spread of Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) continued in 2018. By reducing the spread of AIS, this decreases the damage they can cause to private and public property, industry and the negative effects on recreational opportunities. Eighteen seasonal AIS staff conducted 7,045 watercraft inspections reaching almost 18,882 people with the message to prevent AIS. Two-hundred one access point vegetation surveys were completed at boat ramps and fishing jetties on high use water bodies to identify any new infestations of AIS. One-hundred four whole lake vegetation surveys were completed.
- The NRC approved public land and conservation easement acquisitions and donations totaling 3,595 acres, protecting the natural resources and providing Iowans with new and enhanced outdoor recreational opportunities. 3,165 of these acres directly impact water quality and watershed improvement efforts. In FY2018, the DNR paid \$1,072,689 in property taxes on public land.

- The Forestry Bureau’s Woodland Health Initiative continues to provide technical assistance to communities and rural landowners. Assistance was provided to 289 communities and 15 community tree inventories were completed by forestry staff and 13 were contracted with Woodland Health dollars. Thirty-six workshops were conducted to educate Iowans about serious insect, disease, invasive plant species and environmental problems in Iowa’s communities and woodlands.
- In 2018, Iowa held its first operational 16-day Special Teal Season from September 1-16, statewide. Survey reports received have been very positive for both hunter participation and teal harvest numbers. This successful season followed a four-year experimental September Teal Season from 2014-17.
- Youth participation in mentored hunting and fishing programs, hunter education classes, shooting sports in schools and fishing programs continued to expand across Iowa.
 - In 2018, 9,935 students were certified in Hunter Education, 300 Iowa schools were teaching archery to 50,000 Iowa students and the number of students participating in the Scholastic Clay Target program has grown from 395 students in 2007 to 3,922 students in 2018.
 - 24,900 youth and novice anglers participated in Fish Iowa!, after school, Scouts and other youth programs. 11,777 youth were involved in community fishing events.
 - 40,088 youth participated in school and community programs on wildlife conservation through Project Wild, Aquatic Wild and Growing Up Wild.
- The NRC continued its vigilance in approving 38 engineering, construction, and public capital improvement projects totaling \$15,703,722 on DNR public lands. The NRC encouraged green construction practices and the implementation of Low Impact Development (LID) techniques. \$4,146,273 of the above projects total were associated with lake restoration projects. In addition, multiple cooperative agreements were approved to improve watershed, and water quality projects.
- The NRC established hunting and fishing seasons and regulations and secured land management issues including leases and conservation easements.

Iowa Natural Resource Commission 2019 Legislative Recommendations

As this year's General Assembly convenes, the NRC urges the Iowa Legislature to lend due recognition in its decision-making process to the Department of Natural Resources. Recommendations of the NRC are:

- **Fund the DNR's Lake Restoration and Water Quality Improvement Programs at \$9.6 million annually.** Iowans value healthy lakes and respond to restoration efforts with a significant increase in recreational usage. The highly successful lake restoration projects add to the state's overall water quality and complement efforts of the Nutrient Reduction Strategy by working in targeted watersheds above our significant publicly-owned lakes.
- **Fund state park infrastructure improvements at \$5 million annually.** The Legislature's annual \$5 million appropriation, which began in 2012 to upgrade aging and deteriorating infrastructure in the state parks system, should be continued, leveraging resources by partnering with organizations such as the Iowa Parks Foundation. **Let's make all of Iowa's state parks the best that they can be by our Parks 2020 Centennial Celebration.**
- **Fund the Resource Enhancement and Protection Program (REAP) at \$20 million which was the original legislative intent of the program.** The original REAP formula used to allocate the REAP funds for a variety of programs should be maintained. REAP grants are time-tested to be highly successful avenues for the state, counties and cities to fund conservation, recreation, historical, and infrastructure projects.
- **Support the Woodland Health Initiative and provide \$2,000,000 in Community Woodland Health funds** for grants, technical assistance, and education to an additional 75-100 Iowa communities. This will support local communities with planning in their combat against issues such as the insect damage to millions of ash trees due to the invasive Emerald Ash Borer.
- **Support and expand the Iowa Habitat Access Program (IHAP).** Currently 22,547 acres are voluntarily enrolled in the program at 161 sites and are open to public hunting during 2018-19 hunting season. Iowa ranks 49th in the country for the least public-land holdings. IHAP benefits participating land-owners, the state and Iowa hunters.
- **Fund the Low-Head Dam Modification Program and Water Trails at \$1 million annually.** Iowa has 176 low-head dams in 57 of Iowa's 99 counties. These dams pose safety threats to people and communities, burden owners with costly repairs and diminish stream health and the vitality of aquatic life. Dam modification eliminates problems while improving safety, reducing financial costs, enhancing fisheries, restoring river connectivity and habitat, and increasing recreational opportunities.

**Iowa Natural Resource Commission
2019 Legislative Recommendations (continued)**

- **Recognize and support the DNR’s communication and outreach programs designed to strategically increase younger and all ages of 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. In addition, it’s essential to increase collaborative efforts with stakeholders to Recruit, Retain and Reactivate (R3) hunters, anglers and shooting sports participants of all ages, genders, and ethnic groups to make participation more easily accessible.

- **Educate the appropriate resource user groups and decision makers of the impacts of Aquatic and Terrestrial Invasive Species** and the importance of preventing the introduction and spread of invasive species.

- **Fund the Natural Resources and Outdoor Recreation Trust Fund by devoting 3/8 of each penny of sales tax for the betterment of Iowa’s natural resources.** This is prescribed by the passage of the 2010 Iowa Constitutional ballot initiative, approved by 63% of Iowans, and which resulted in the addition of Article VII, Section 10, to the Iowa Constitution. This funding, as recommended by the legislatively mandated Sustainable Funding Advisory Committee, would dedicate an estimated \$150 million annually to Iowa’s woefully under-funded conservation, habitat, water quality, and recreational initiatives.

Conclusion

The NRC is a group of seven 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

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