

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

From: The Iowa Natural Resource Commission

Date: December 30, 2022

2022 NRC Annual Report

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 of the NRC for 2022.

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

Sincerely,

The Natural Resource Commissioners:

Marcus Branstad, Chair, Adel, IA

Laura Foell, Schaller, IA

Uriah Hansen, Grimes, IA

Laura Hommel, Secretary, Eldora, IA

Tammi Kircher, Keokuk, IA

Tom Prickett, Vice Chair, Glenwood, IA

Margo Underwood, Clear Lake, IA

Iowa Natural Resource Commission

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.

As we look back on 2022 and the many accomplishments for the Department of Natural Resources and their team, we are proud of what was accomplished, yet we understand that there is a tremendous opportunity to further the impact we have on conservation, natural resources, and accessibility to natural resources within the State of Iowa. In review of the Commission business throughout the past year, the following areas have been identified as having great impact in serving the citizens of Iowa.

To begin with, every year, the Natural Resource Commission reviews the DNR's budget request. As a separate entity from the Department, we see that funding to support the growing need and interest in Outreach & Community Resources, Public Use & Natural Resources Development, and Water Quality & Accessibility is very important to sustain and support these programs. These areas, along with the other areas outlined in the constitutionally created Natural Resources and Outdoor Recreation Trust Fund, are a vital component in Iowa's growth - not only in improvements to natural resources and outdoor recreation, but in the positive economic impact and workforce benefits that these amenities provide.

Outreach & Community Resources

The Natural Resource Commission values education, outreach, and community support regarding natural resources and resource management. The following are examples of the DNR's work that the NRC supports regarding this topic:

- Youth participation in mentored hunting and fishing programs, hunter education classes, shooting sports in schools and fishing programs continued to expand across Iowa. In Fiscal Year 2022:
 - 215 Hunter Education classes were held across the State with 9367 students being certified in Hunter Education.
 - 4493 athletes on 146 teams participated in the Scholastic Clay Target Program
 - 18 Basic Archery Instructor Workshops were held and certified 158 Basic Archery Instructors.
 - 36,025 archers from 214 schools participated in Iowa's two-week in-school Archery in the Schools Program.
 - In partnership with other organizations, approximately 92 hunting and recreational shooting classes, clinics, workshops and camps were held with approximately 532 participants. Types of offerings included Becoming an Outdoors Woman (BOW) workshops, Beyond BOW workshops, Learn to Hunt Workshops, Learn to Trap Workshops, Field to Fork Programs, mentored hunts, and deer recovery and blood tracking.
 - 31,520 youth and novice anglers participated in *Fish Iowa!* school, after school, Scouts, and other youth programs. 11,143 youth and novice anglers participated in community fishing events and programs. An additional 4,880 participated in general outdoor skills programs led by instructors trained through "Basic Outdoor Skills" workshops and 1,260 participated in "Explore Bowfishing" programs.
 - 29,780 youth participated in school and community programs on wildlife conservation through *Project WILD*, *Aquatic WILD* and *Growing Up WILD*.

- The Forestry Woodland Health Initiative continues to provide technical assistance to communities and rural landowners. Efforts in Federal Fiscal Year 2022 included:
 - Assistance was provided to 331 communities and 40 community tree inventories were completed by forestry staff and contractors.
 - 7 workshops were conducted, with 429 attendees, to educate Iowans about serious insect, disease, invasive plant species and environmental problems in Iowa's communities and woodlands.
 - 1,418 woodland management plans were developed.
 - 1,980 woodland owners were assisted.

- Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) surveillance, testing, and education remains a priority for the DNR. A comprehensive web page and dashboard on the Iowa DNR website provides a wealth of information about the disease and what is being done to monitor it across Iowa. Visitors to the webpage will learn about the current status of CWD in Iowa, yearly statewide CWD sampling test results, the multiple management zones established in the state, and how Iowans can help stop the spread.

Public Use & Natural Resources Development

- In FY23, nineteen Resource Enhancement and Protection (REAP) city and county grant projects were approved (18 City grants totaling \$1,729,426 and 1 County project for \$893,000). Thirty grants were received that did not qualify for the current amount of dollars allotted by the State for a total of \$4,717,501.

- In calendar 2022, 36 state park improvement projects in 21 different state parks were approved in the amount of \$19,142,599.31. These projects included upgrading aging and storm damaged infrastructure, shoreline armoring, pavement repairs and maintenance, parking lot work, new restrooms, dock purchase, trail and culvert repairs, boat ramp reconstruction, dam repairs and entry sign portals.

- The Iowa Habitat and Access Program (IHAP) has received strong support from private landowners and hunters to continue the program. There were four new IHAP projects approved by the NRC in FY 2022. The newly enrolled sites opened up 806.5 additional acres for public hunting. Currently there are 234 IHAP sites totaling 33,353 acres that are open for hunting during the 2022-2023 hunting season.

- The NRC approved public land and conservation easement acquisitions and donations totaling 2,462 acres, protecting the natural resources and providing Iowans with new and enhanced outdoor recreational opportunities in FY22. 1,078 of these acres directly impact water quality and watershed improvement efforts. Also, in FY22, the DNR paid \$1,233,045 in property taxes on public land.

- In 2022, the NRC continued its vigilance in reviewing and approving 64 engineering, construction, and public capital improvement projects totaling \$30,819,950.71 on DNR public lands. The NRC encouraged green construction practices and the implementation of Low Impact Development (LID) techniques. \$8,245,979.71 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, also, established hunting and fishing seasons and regulations, and reviewed leases, contracts, and conservation easement requests related to public land management.

Water Quality & Accessibility

- The NRC approved 10 contracts and 6 engineering projects during FY22 that involved Lake Restoration Program funding. These approved items allowed the Lakes Program to implement restoration efforts among the twenty-one projects that are in progress throughout the state and develop community outreach, evaluation or planning initiatives at fourteen lakes.
- Educational programs to prevent the spread of Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) continued in 2022. By reducing the spread of AIS, this decreases the damage they can cause to private and public property, industry, as well as the negative effects on recreational opportunities. Seventeen Seasonal Natural Resources Aides helped with this effort by completing the following work: 2,671 watercraft inspections reaching 7,359 people on 79 waterbodies; 106 angler interviews on 22 trout streams; 163 full vegetation surveys; and surveyed vegetation at 467 access points on 53 lakes. Efforts also included active zebra mussel research, analysis, and management and multimedia efforts to provide education and outreach regarding AIS.
- Four new low-head dam mitigation projects were initiated and one was completed in FY2022. Since 2008, when the low-head dam public hazard program was implemented, 34 low-head dam mitigation projects have been completed.
- The Black Hawk County Water Trails system on the Cedar River, Black Hawk Creek, and George Wyth Lakes was officially designated as a water trail in FY2022. Currently five water trail projects are in planning stages, 33 are state designated with 1,100 total water trail miles in the state system.

Continued Education

To better understand the processes and work involved in supporting Iowa's natural resources, and the complex and diverse nature of the work, the Natural Resource Commission requests and participates in continuing education opportunities with the Department. These opportunities range from presentations at our business meetings to field tours, where we also can engage with Iowans across the State. In 2022, in addition to monthly updates from the DNR Director and CRD Division Administrator, the wide range of presentation topics included: Turtle Survey Results, Fish Survey Data and Extrapolation, Parks and Institutional Road Construction and Maintenance Projects, Process Review for Contested Cases, Drought/Flood Conditions, Avian Influenza, DNR's Social Media Efforts, the Conservation Science Program, the Condition of Iowa's Forest Health, the Forestry Action Plan, the HIP Registration System, Chronic Wasting Disease, Deer Management Zones, and the Special Events Process. For field experience, we toured the State Forest Nursery and Geo Wyth State Park, and observed the 2022 Iowa Scholastic Clay Target Program State Championships. We also held our annual joint meeting and field tour in June with the Environmental Protection Commission.

Conclusion

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 support that end. We, also, make ourselves personally available to the public via written or verbal communication, as well as welcoming public comment at each NRC business meeting to provide another opportunity for citizens' voices to be heard.

The passionate and professional DNR staff and the NRC will continue to tirelessly place Iowa's natural resources on a lofty level of priority.

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

Respectfully Submitted,
The Iowa Natural Resource Commission



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