

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

**From: The Iowa Natural Resource Commission**

**Date: December 30, 2023**

## **2023 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 2023.

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, Huxley, IA

Tammi Kircher, Keokuk, IA

Tom Prickett, Vice Chair, Glenwood, IA

Kenny Buck, Denison, IA

Laura Kudej, Forest City, IA

**Iowa Natural Resource Commission**

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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 2023 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. **Overall, we saw a 68% increase in participation from 2022 in our various outreach & community programs.**

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 2023:
  - 280 Hunter Education classes were held across the State with 11,240 students being certified in Hunter Education.
  - 4641 athletes on 155 teams participated in the Scholastic Clay Target Program
  - 22 Basic Archery Instructor Workshops were held and certified 173 Basic Archery Instructors.
  - 49,448 archers from 230 schools participated in Iowa's two-week, in-school Archery in the Schools Program.
  - In partnership with other organizations, approximately 103 hunting and recreational shooting classes, clinics, workshops and camps were held with approximately 637 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 training.
  - 54,480 youth and novice anglers participated in *Fish Iowa!* through school, after school, Scouts, and other youth programs. 8,483 youth and novice anglers participated in community fishing events and programs. An additional 7,520 participated in general outdoor skills programs led by instructors trained through "Basic Outdoor Skills" workshops and 1,100 participated in "Explore Bowfishing" programs.

- 80,120 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 2023 included:
  - Assistance was provided to 320 communities and 26 community tree inventories were completed by forestry staff and contractors.
  - 9 workshops were conducted, with 516 attendees, to educate Iowans about serious insect, disease, invasive plant species and environmental problems in Iowa's communities and woodlands.
  - 1,225 woodland management plans were developed.
  - 1,803 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**

The Natural Resources Commission continues to work with the department staff to ensure we grow, improve, and develop opportunities for increased public access and utilization of natural resources within the state. We are committed to working with staff to advance opportunities and maximize funding for further opportunities.

- In FY23, 21 Resource Enhancement and Protection (REAP) city and county grant projects were approved (19 City grants totaling \$1,900,359 and 2 County projects for \$750,000).
- In calendar 2023, 17 state park improvement projects in the amount of \$5,583,369.87. 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 two new IHAP projects approved by the NRC in FY 2023. The newly enrolled sites opened up 364 additional acres for public hunting. Currently there are 235 IHAP sites totaling 33,399 acres that are open for hunting during the 2023-2024 hunting season.
- The NRC approved public land and conservation easement acquisitions and donations totaling 2,986 acres, protecting the natural resources and providing Iowans with new and enhanced outdoor recreational opportunities in FY23. Also, in FY23, the DNR paid \$1,307,706 in property taxes on public land.

- In 2023, the NRC continued its vigilance in reviewing and approving engineering, construction, and public capital improvement projects totaling \$15,996,724 on DNR public lands. The NRC encouraged green construction practices and the implementation of Low Impact Development (LID) techniques. \$12,068,446 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 4 engineering projects during FY23 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 2023. 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: 2,813 watercraft inspections reaching 7,061 people on 86 waterbodies; 174 angler interviews on 19 trout streams; and surveyed vegetation at 461 access points on 79 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 FY2023. Since 2008, when the low-head dam public hazard program was implemented, 36 low-head dam mitigation projects have been completed.

### **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.

## **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 high 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

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Marcus Branstad", with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

Marcus Branstad, NRC Chair  
Commissioner, Iowa Natural Resource Commission  
[Marcus.Branstad@dnr.iowa.gov](mailto:Marcus.Branstad@dnr.iowa.gov)

## Supporting Year Over Year Data Summary

\*Numbers in the chart reflect items presented to the Commission and may not reflect complete program data

	Category	2022	2023	YOY Change
<b>Education &amp; Outreach</b>	Hunter Ed Classes	215	280	30.2%
	Hunters Ed Students	9,367	11,240	20.0%
	Scholastic Clay Target & Action Shooting Athletes	4,493	4,641	3.3%
	Scholastic Clay Target & Action Shooting Teams	146	155	6.2%
	Basic Archery Instructor Training Workshops Held	18	22	22.2%
	Basic Archery Instructors Trained	158	173	9.5%
	Archers in School Participants (In-School)	36,025	49,448	37.3%
	Archers in School Participating Schools (In-School)	214	230	7.5%
	Learn to Hunt, Trap, Shoot Clinics	92	103	12.0%
	Learn to Hunt, Trap, Shoot Clinics Participants	531	637	20.0%
	Fish Iowa Participants	31,520	54,480	72.8%
	Community Fishing Events Participants	11,143	8,483	-23.9%
	General Outdoor Skill Participants	4,880	7,520	54.1%
	Bowfishing Programs	1,260	1,100	-12.7%
Project Wild Programs (Wild, Aquatic & Growing Up)	29,780	80,120	169.0%	
	<b>Overall Participation</b>	<b>129,842</b>	<b>218,632</b>	<b>68.4%</b>
<b>Woodland Health Initiative</b>	Communities Assisted	331	320	-3.3%
	Tree Inventories	40	26	-35.0%
	Workshops Conducted	7	9	28.6%
	Workshop Attendees	429	516	20.3%
	Woodland Management Plans	1,418	1,225	-13.6%
	Woodland Owners Assisted	1,980	1,803	-8.9%
	<b>Overall Participation</b>	<b>4,205</b>	<b>3,899</b>	<b>-7.3%</b>

	Category	2022	2023	YOY Change
<b>Public Use &amp; Natural Resource Development</b>	REAP Grants	19	21	10.5%
	City Grant Funding	\$ 1,729,426	\$ 1,900,359	9.9%
	County Grant	\$ 893,000	\$ 750,000	-16.0%
	State Park Improvements	36	17	-52.8%
	State Park Improvement Spend	\$ 19,142,599	\$ 5,583,370	-70.8%
	IHAP New Projects	4	2	-50.0%
	New IHAP Acres	806.5	364	-54.9%
	Total IHAP Sites	234	235	0.4%
	Total IHAP Acres	33,353	33,399.03	0.1%
	Public Land Easements/Acquisitions Acres	2,462	2,986	22.0%
	Fiscal year taxes paid on public land	\$ 1,233,045	\$ 1,307,706	6.0%
	Engineering/Construction/Improvement Projects	\$ 30,819,951	\$ 15,996,724	-48.1%
	Lake Restoration Spending	\$ 9,209,439	\$ 12,068,446	31.0%
	<b>Water Quality &amp; Accessibility</b>			
<b>Water Quality &amp; Accessibility</b>	Contracts	10	10	0.0%
	Engineering Projects	6	4	-33.3%
	Watercraft Inspections	7359	7061	-4.0%
	Waterbody/Watercraft Inspections	79	86	9.0%
	Angler Interviews	106	174	64.0%
	Trout Streams	22	19	-14.0%
	Access Points	467	461	-1.3%
	Lakes	53	79	33.0%
	Low Head Dam Projects	4	4	0.0%
	Total Lowhead Dam Projects since implementation	34	36	5.9%
	Water Trail Projects	33	33	0.0%
	Water Trail Miles	1100	1150	4.5%
	<b>Overall Participation</b>	<b>9436</b>	<b>1237</b>	<b>64.1%</b>