

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

From: The Iowa Natural Resource Commission

Date: December 31, 2025

2025 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 2025 and includes the Commissions primary policy recommendation for 2025.

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

Sincerely,

Thomas D. Prickett, Chair, Glenwood, IA

The Natural Resource Commissioners:

Collin Brecher, Adel, IA

Bill Moritz, Fairfield, IA

Uriah Hansen, Vice Chair, Huxley, IA

Tammi Kircher, Secretary, Keokuk, IA

Kenny Buck, Denison, IA

Laura Kudej, Forest City, IA

Iowa Natural Resource Commission

The Iowa Natural Resources Commission is pleased to report continued achievements and steady growth across priority areas in 2025. This year marked consistent progress in expanding public engagement, enhancing natural resource access, and strengthening Iowa's conservation efforts.

Key Highlights:

Sustained Growth in Public Engagement: Iowa saw a 6% increase in overall participation across outreach and community programs, with 135,438 participants compared to 128,130 in 2024. Exceptional growth was seen in General Outdoor Skills programs with 18,411 participants (65% increase), Community Fishing Events reaching 13,102 participants (18% increase), and Learn to Hunt, Trap, and Shoot clinics expanding to 164 clinics serving 748 participants (21% and 9% increases respectively). Hunter Education continued its strong performance with 11,617 students certified through 244 classes across the state.

Expanded Public Access: The NRC approved significant investments in public infrastructure, including 14 state park improvement projects. The Iowa Habitat and Access Program added 307 new acres (73% increase from 2024), with total program acreage maintained at 230 sites encompassing 32,528 acres available for public hunting.

Water Quality Leadership: The NRC approved 14 contracts and 7 engineering projects supporting lake restoration efforts across Iowa. Water quality initiatives included 6,065 watercraft inspections conducted across 90 waterbodies, 231 angler interviews on 15 trout streams, and vegetation surveys at 377 access points on 72 lakes throughout the state.

Strategic Innovation: The NRC continues examining potential license structure variations, including measures to prioritize Iowa residents' access to outdoor recreation areas and hunting opportunities. The NRC recognizes these innovative strategies are necessary to meet the growing demand for outdoor recreation areas from Iowa citizens.

Conservation Impact: Through comprehensive programs spanning education, habitat management, and infrastructure development, the NRC continues to demonstrate that strategic investment in natural resources generates significant economic, recreational, and quality-of-life benefits for all Iowans. This report details how the NRC's partnerships with the DNR and commitment to citizen engagement are building a stronger foundation for Iowa's natural resource legacy.

Outreach & Community Resources

The Natural Resource Commission values education, outreach, and community support regarding natural resources and resource management. Overall, we saw a 6% increase in participation from 2024 in our various outreach and community programs.

The following are examples of the DNR's diligent efforts 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 2025:

- 244 Hunter Education classes were held across the State with 11,617 students being certified in Hunter Education.
- 4,623 athletes on 135 teams participated in the Scholastic Clay Target Program.
- 21 Basic Archery Instructor Workshops were held and certified 176 Basic Archery Instructors.
- 45,472 archers from 260 schools participated in Iowa's two-week, in-school Archery in the Schools Program.

In partnership with other organizations, 164 hunting and recreational shooting classes, clinics, workshops and camps were held with approximately 748 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.

32,046 youth and novice anglers participated in Fish Iowa! through school, after school, Scouts, and other youth programs. 13,102 youth and novice anglers participated in community fishing events and programs. An additional 18,411 participated in general outdoor skills programs led by instructors trained through "Basic Outdoor Skills" workshops.

9,243 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 2025 included:

- Assistance was provided to 413 communities and 26 community tree inventories were completed by forestry staff and contractors.
- 1,276 woodland management plans were developed.
- 1,472 woodland owners were assisted.

Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) surveillance, testing, and education remains a priority for the DNR. The DNR has partnered with Iowa deer hunters to collect needed lymph node tissue samples to monitor CWD in Iowa's deer population to be utilized in the DNR ongoing efforts to contain and combat CWD in order to preserve Iowa great white-tailed deer hunting tradition. A comprehensive web based Interactive 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 of CWD.

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 calendar year 2025, 14 state park improvement projects were approved. 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 was one new IHAP project approved by the NRC in FY 2025. The newly enrolled site opened up 307 additional acres for public hunting. Currently there are 230 IHAP sites totaling 32,528 acres that are open for hunting during the 2025-2026 hunting season.

The NRC is actively exploring expanded license structures and opportunities to utilize habitat stamps and other specialized license types for users beyond traditional hunting and fishing activities on public properties, following successful models implemented in other states. Additionally, there is growing interest in preserving and prioritizing resident access to Iowa's natural resources through potential license restrictions or adaptations that would ensure Iowa residents maintain preferential opportunities for hunting and outdoor recreation on public lands.

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 14 contracts and 7 engineering projects during FY25 that involved Lake Restoration Program funding. These approved items allowed the Lakes Program to implement restoration efforts among projects in progress throughout the state and develop community outreach, evaluation, and planning initiatives at various lakes.

Educational programs to prevent the spread of Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) continued in 2025. 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. Seasonal Natural Resources Aides helped with this effort by completing the following work: 6,065 watercraft inspections on 90 waterbodies; 231 angler interviews on 15 trout streams; and surveyed vegetation at 377 access points on 72 lakes. Efforts also included active zebra mussel research, analysis, and management and multimedia efforts to provide education and outreach regarding AIS.

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.

NRC's Primary Policy Recommendation

The traditional funding model for wildlife conservation in the United States and Iowa is largely derived from and reliant upon sportsmen and sportswomen. This funding model has been successful in restoring habitat, threatened wildlife species, and sustaining hunting, fishing, and trapping opportunities for Iowans. Presently the DNR oversees 513 wildlife areas that serve to protect and manage habitat for pollinators, game species, and other diverse species. A dedicated account, the Fish and Wildlife Trust Fund, was established in 1937 to support the management and regulation of Iowa's abundant wildlife

and fishery resources. In 1996 Iowa voters approved a constitutional amendment to protect the Fish and Wildlife Trust Fund. Fishing and hunting licenses are a critical component of funding the Fish and Wildlife Trust Fund. The last license fee increase occurred in 2019. Also in 2019, the DNR was tasked with periodically evaluating the license fees to ensure that the fees are sufficient to meet the needs of natural resource management. See, Iowa Code 483A.1. The DNR was also granted ability to increase license fees not to exceed 5 percent in any calendar year. Economic and inflationary factors have strained the effectiveness of every dollar in the Fish and Wildlife Trust Fund. A 5 percent license fee increase is needed and appropriate at this time. A 5 percent increase on a \$35 annual hunting license would result in a de minimis increase of \$1.75 per licensee. Stakeholders and hunters have overwhelmingly voiced strong support for a license fee increase. The NRC is strongly and unanimously in support of a license fee increase and respectfully requests your support in effectuating such an increase.

Conclusion

Polling and other survey tools illustrate that Iowa citizens care deeply about natural resources and the recreational opportunities they provide, while also beginning to show a desire to search out new funding methods, updates to long standing structures, and overall enhancement to a model that's been in place for decades.

Added benefits of natural resources and opportunities 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



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Supporting Year Over Year Data Summary

	Category	2024	2025	YOY Change
Education & Outreach	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%
	Overall Participation	129,842	218,632	68.4%
Woodland Health Initiative	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%
	Overall Participation	4,205	3,899	-7.3%

	Category	2024	2025	YOY Change
Public Use & Natural Resource Development	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	\$ 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%
Water Quality & Accessibility	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%
	Overall Participation	9436	1237	64.1%