

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

From: The Iowa Natural Resource Commission

Date: January 9, 2015

2014 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 2014 and includes the commission's recommendations for policy and legislative changes for 2015.

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,



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Natural Resource Commission

Dr. Sally Prickett, Vice-Chair, Glenwood
Kim Francisco, Secretary, Lucas
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Iowa Natural Resource Commission 2014 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 eight 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 \$1.54 billion per year, including \$974 million in local retail sales that creates and supports more than 17,800 jobs! Visitors and users of Iowa's state parks, rivers, lakes, forests and trails account for \$2.63 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 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 increase the fiscal obligations necessary for the DNR to execute its vital and essential work, which also enhances the health and well-being of Iowa citizens.

Iowa Natural Resource Commission 2014 Major Accomplishments

- Thirty Resource Enhancement and Protection (REAP) city and county projects were approved in the amount of \$3,728,429. If REAP had been fully funded at \$20 million, which was the original legislative intent upon passage, another nine projects worth \$984,128 could have been approved in FY15. In celebration of REAP's 25th anniversary, the NRC recommended that REAP be funded at \$25 million. If REAP had been funded at \$25 million, another twenty projects worth \$2,015,833 could have been approved in FY15.
- Thirty state park improvement projects were approved. These projects included upgrading aging and flood-ravaged infrastructure, repairing, replacing and remodeling existing park facilities, and adding some new facilities such as interpretive kiosks and additional restrooms where needed. The NRC participated on the Governor's Green Ribbon Commission to develop a Parks Strategic Plan for 2020.
- The NRC approved 11 Lake Restoration Program contracts and 5 engineering projects. The Lake Restoration Program has twenty-one lake restoration projects in progress and 12 projects in initial evaluation or planning stages throughout the state.
- Under the Iowa Habitat and Access Program (IHAP), the NRC approved habitat restorations on 53 sites totaling 8,200 acres during the past three years. Hunter satisfaction surveys showed overwhelming satisfaction by hunters. Landowner surveys showed 100% were satisfied with the program. In 2014, Iowa received \$3 million in the Federal Farm Bill Voluntary Public Access – Habitat Incentive Program to expand the IHAP in 2015.
- Preventing the spread of Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) was promoted using a “Clean, Drain, Dry” message on billboards, in print media, television, radio, boat ramp signs, fishing events and conferences. Seventeen Seasonal Assistants conducted over 9,000 watercraft inspections reaching almost 25,000 people with the message to prevent AIS. Water bodies across the state were surveyed or monitored for zebra mussels, vegetation and brittle niad.
- The NRC approved public land and conservation easement acquisitions totaling 2,300 acres, protecting the natural resources and providing Iowans with more outdoor recreational opportunities. 1,204 of those acres directly impact water quality and watershed improvement efforts. In 2014, the DNR paid \$894,516 in property taxes on public land purchased with REAP or Wildlife Habitat Stamp funds.
- The Forestry Bureau's Woodland Health Initiative continues to provide technical assistance to communities and rural landowners. Assistance was provided to 182 communities and 71 community tree inventories were completed. Fifty Emerald Ash Borer Workshops were held with 2,785 attendees.

- A new Teal Waterfowl hunting season was held September 6-21, 2014. This was the first “teal only” season held in Iowa since 1970. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Mississippi Flyway Council offered production states, including Iowa, an experimental 3-year season beginning in 2014. Feedback from hunters was largely positive. A 2015 waterfowl hunter mail survey will also provide further insight on participation and support for the season.
- Youth participation in mentored hunting and fishing programs, hunter education classes and shooting sports in schools continued to expand across Iowa in 2014.
 - Over 125,000 youth learned about Iowa’s natural resources through local school and community-based programs.
 - Over 103,000 youth and novice anglers participated in school and community-based fishing programs.
 - 11,627 students were certified in Hunter Education. DNR’s conservation officers contributed over 1,617 hours towards mentored hunts in their counties.
 - 1,647 youth archers from 35 schools participated in the National Archery in the Schools Program.
 - 2,709 students participated in the shooting sports for clay target program.
- The NRC continued its vigilance in approving 55 engineering, construction and public improvement projects totaling \$24,309,681.83 on DNR public lands and Wildlife Management Areas. The NRC encouraged green construction practices and the implementation of Low Impact Development (LID) techniques. \$10,874,526.37 of the above projects total was associated with lake restoration, watershed and water quality improvement projects.
- The NRC heard contested court cases involving conservation law enforcement issues and a complex contested case regarding Chronic Wasting Disease. The NRC established hunting and fishing seasons and regulations and secured land management issues including leases and conservation easements.

Iowa Natural Resource Commission 2015 Legislative Recommendations

As the new 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 \$20 million which was the original legislative intent of the program. REAP grants are time-tested to be highly successful avenues for the state, counties and cities to fund conservation, recreation, historical and infrastructure projects.
- Fund the DNR's Lake Restoration and Water Quality Improvement Programs at \$9.6 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 Woodland Health Initiative and provide \$1.9 million in Community Woodland Health grants, technical assistance and education to 100 additional 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 and expand the Iowa Habitat Access Program (IHAP). Currently 8,200 acres are voluntarily enrolled in the program at 53 sites.
- 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 Natural Resources and Outdoor Recreation 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 back-grounds, 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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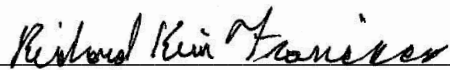
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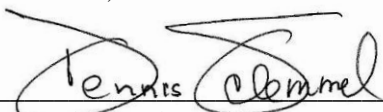
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