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## BUDGET UNIT BRIEF – FY 2026

Fiscal Services Division

July 1, 2025



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## Lake Restoration and Water Quality Program — RIIF

### Purpose

In 2006, the General Assembly established and codified the Lake Restoration Program in Iowa Code section [456A.33B](#). The statute requires the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to use a science-based approach to achieve lake water quality improvement. In addition, the DNR is required to provide a Lake Restoration Plan and Report annually to the Transportation, Infrastructure, and Capitals Appropriations Subcommittee and to the Legislative Services Agency. The statute also specifies the requirements for the projects in the Program to improve and restore lakes and water quality around the State.

### History

Lake restoration, specifically dredging, has taken place in Iowa lakes for more than 50 years. In 1915, the General Assembly enacted legislation requiring the State Highway Commission (predecessor to the Department of Transportation) to study lakes and lake beds in the State and to determine the lakes that should be preserved, drained, or drained and the land sold. The State Highway Commission coordinated with other departments and universities and made surveys of 24 lakes, including more than 63,000 acres of topography, in order to prepare the report. The Commission's findings included recommendations for legislative action, including the adoption of a general policy for lake preservation and improvement. In 1980 and 1992, through funding provided by grants from the United States Environmental Protection Agency, the DNR worked with Iowa State University (ISU) to conduct studies in response to the federal requirement that each state make a survey of public lakes and develop a priority ranking of the lakes for restoration. Utilizing this information, additional studies by the DNR and ISU in 2004 and 2005 were completed to establish the current science-based lake restoration prioritization system that was established in statute in 2006. The DNR developed the current Lake Restoration and Water Quality Program and modeled it after the federal Clean Lakes Program that was established in the 1970s.

Prior to 2006, four lake restoration projects were completed at Lake Ahquabi, Little Wall Lake, Swan Lake, and Union Grove Lake. The General Assembly provided appropriations to the DNR for lake dredging for several years. During FY 1999 to FY 2006, the funding ranged from \$350,000 to \$4.2 million, totaling approximately \$12.9 million. Funding was typically appropriated from the Environment First Fund or the Rebuild Iowa Infrastructure Fund (RIIF). The funding was provided for the DNR to use in accordance with the Department's "A Classification of Iowa's Lakes for Restoration" report.

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### More Information

Iowa DNR Lake Restoration Program and Water Quality Improvement: [iowadnr.gov/environmental-protection/water-quality/lake-restoration](http://iowadnr.gov/environmental-protection/water-quality/lake-restoration)

Map of the Lake Projects: [iowadnr.gov/media/6592/download?inline](http://iowadnr.gov/media/6592/download?inline)

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## Current Program

The six statutory goals that the projects must be designed to achieve are:

- Ensure a cost-effective, positive return on investment for the citizens of Iowa.
- Ensure local community commitment to lake and watershed protection.
- Ensure significant improvement in the water clarity, safety, and quality of Iowa lakes.
- Provide for a sustainable, healthy, and functioning lake system.
- Result in the removal of the lake from the impaired waters list.
- When restored, the lake will contribute to the Department's fish and wildlife conservation plans.

In addition, science-based criteria for how the DNR approaches the projects were added, in addition to water quality targets including clarity, biota, sustainability, and safety. Lakes must meet depth criteria and support a diverse, balanced, and sustainable aquatic community. Water quality benefits must be sustained for at least 50 years, and beaches and water used for recreational use must meet water quality standards. Also, biologic controls must be used to the maximum extent possible, and any dredging must meet depth criteria. Any delivery of phosphorus and sediment from the watershed must be controlled and in place before lake restoration begins.

The 2006 legislation put the initial focus on 35 significant public lake projects. In 2016, legislation required the DNR to maintain a list of up to 5 public shallow lakes or wetlands in addition to the list of 35 significant public lakes. Each year, the DNR provides the Lake Restoration Report and Plan to the General Assembly and includes the status of existing projects as well as recommendations for future projects with anticipated funding. The DNR lake restoration [map](#) provides the location of all lake projects.

## Funding

Since FY 2007, funding levels have varied and funding has typically been provided from the RIIF. Since FY 2015, the DNR has received an appropriation of \$9.6 million each year from the RIIF, with the exception of one year. In FY 2021, the DNR received an appropriation of \$8.6 million.

In addition to State funding, projects have received funding from local groups such as conservation boards and city or county governments. In addition, the DNR has partnered on occasion with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Also, private funds may be provided toward a particular project through community fundraising efforts. Iowa Code section 456A.33B requires the DNR to meet with representatives of the communities to develop a joint lake restoration action plan.

## Related Statutes and Administrative Rules

Iowa Code section [456A.33B](#)

Iowa Administrative Code [571—31](#)

## Budget Unit Number

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